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THE REV. ALFRED WILLIAMS, M.A.

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ALTHOUGH, in the case of an unbeneficed Clergyman, the publication of Sermons by Subscription would seem to be a legitimate and not objectionable means of making some small addition to a limited and very precarious income, and of meeting the increasing demands of a young Family; yet the writer of this volume begs to say, in answer to many requests to a contrary effect, that it is not his intention to intrude any more in this manner, on the Congregations with which he has the pleasure of being connected; having already so abundantly experienced their good-will towards him.

After fifteen years of constant duty in London, the liberal encouragement afforded to this

volume is highly gratifying to the writer; but he considers himself more particularly a debtor for the very many kind communications which he has received in the progress of the volume, and which have been of such a nature, that, instead of appropriating to himself the praise conveyed in them, he will continue to labour in the hope of deserving it.

It is with regret that the writer has not been able to include in this volume, a sermon on ‘Regeneration,’ shewing from Scripture and other sources its identity with the Sacred ordinance of Baptism. Two causes have hindered him from complying with the wishes expressed to him respecting this Sermon. In the first place, he has been recommended to make certain additions to it—explanatory of the views of those from whom he differs,—and to publish it separately, and in a cheap form; and besides this, his time has been so much occupied with Tuition, and his thoughts of late

have been so distracted by severe and long continued sickness in his family, that he has not been able to prepare the sermon for immediate publication. With this exception, he believes that he has had the pleasure of complying with every request made to him: and he concludes with repeating his warmest thanks for the favourable light in which his humble services are viewed; venturing a hope, which can hardly be realized, that the usefulness of this volume may bear some fair proportion to the kind feeling with which it has been received.

*Guilford Street, Russell Square,
March, 1843.*

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S E R M O N S.

SERMON I.

UNSEARCHABLENESS OF GOD'S WAYS.

ROMANS xi. 33.

O ! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.

IN such terms of devout admiration, the Apostle concludes a chapter, occupied with considerations of God's dealings with the Jews and Gentiles. He is lost in wonder at the unfathomable depths and infinite abundance of the wisdom of God in making, first, the rejection of the Jews, a means of calling the Gentiles; and, then, in working upon the contumacious Jews, by his mercy shewn to the Gentiles. By 'judgments' expositors understand the governance of God's Providence; and by 'ways' that administration of his Providence, by which his purposes are brought to effect. The Apostle pronounces of both alike,

‘his judgments,’ and ‘his ways,’ that they are secret, unsearchable, and unfathomable.

This being the direct application of the words, they may with propriety be used as the basis of a few reflections on the inscrutability of God’s Providence in general ; without reference to the particular subjects with which the chapter is concerned. Let us, then, consider first, some of the reasons or causes, wherefore the ways of God’s Providence are inscrutable to man ; and secondly, let us examine certain lessons of wisdom conveyed to us in the fact, that his “judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.”

The most obvious reason, wherefore the ways of God are inscrutable to us, is to be discerned in the infinity of the divine attributes, particularly the attribute of wisdom ; and the limited and partial character of our capabilities of knowing and judging. God is termed in Scripture, ‘the only wise ;’ He is said ‘to dwell in the light, which no man can approach unto ;’ and, moreover, “to charge his angels with folly ;” and, this being his character, it can be no just cause of surprise ‘that beings of inferior intelligence, such as ourselves, should be unable to

fathom His counsels, and unravel His policy ; and that their understanding should be confounded with matters into which angels desire to look. A child is incompetent to receive the knowledge of men ; some men cannot attain to that perfection of science, which is familiar to others : it is easy, therefore, to believe on the one hand, that our inability to find out God, is not owing to any variableness of his counsels, or to any obliquity or capriciousness in his proceedings ; but is to be referred to his infinite superiority : and, on the other hand, that much of the divine conduct, which is incomprehensible to us, may be thoroughly apprehended by creatures of a higher order : whilst some rules of the divine economy may be so peculiarly and exclusively proper to God alone, that finite intelligences can by no means approach to the knowledge of them, but must receive them, in humility and in confidence that they are in perfect accordance with those eternal and immutable attributes, which are essential to the character of God.

A second reason wherefore the ways of God's Providence are incomprehensible, or, at least, not comprehended by us, is, that we are accus-

tomed to judge of events by rules so limited, partial, and contracted, that a right judgment in things divine is precluded, if not rendered impossible. By long acquaintance with the little world which we inhabit, and from constant association with beings of like nature, habits, and imperfections with himself, man has attained to certain maxims of prudence and government which answer well enough for the regulation of society, and for individual direction. These, however, cannot be supposed to be sufficiently accurate and comprehensive, if we should apply them as a test of God's dealings. But this we are apt to forget, and to imagine God so far 'such an one as ourselves,' that if He deviate from *our* established practice, He is chargeable with some unaccountable strangeness, and unintelligibleness of proceeding: what *we* should do, or what we think proper to be done, we expect God to do in the same way and time. Because we are used to do good to those whom we love, and to withhold favour from our enemies, we are disappointed and confounded if afflictions are the portion of the righteous, and prosperity the inheritance of the wicked. When iniquity thrives, we ask presumptuously, has God forgotten to be

just? When virtue is oppressed, “is the Lord’s hand shortened that it cannot save?” And why? because we have certain methods of manifesting an oftentimes blind love and groundless displeasure; and, in our conceit, take for granted that pure and infinite justice and goodness ought to exhibit themselves in the same way, and also with the same expedition. The wicked may prosper; the good may languish in adversity: and these circumstances may be contrary to our notions of right and expediency; and baffle our comprehension, and perhaps, weaken our faith; but did we know “the will” after “the counsel of which God worketh,” we should certainly perceive that these afflictions of the good, and mercies to the evil, are in strict accordance with the rules of infinite goodness and justice; links in one consistent chain of a perfectly equitable government; all tending to the furtherance of the divine will, to the everlasting and exceeding felicity of the good, to the reformation or more thoroughly just condemnation of the wicked.

A third reason of the inscrutability of God’s Providence is to be found in the manner of his working, and the nature of the instruments which he commonly employs. The Almighty

Governor of the Universe, holding the reins of absolute and universal dominion; and knowing that His will must take place; and having eternity at his command and disposal; does not adopt the most compendious way, as if time were the limit of his sovereignty; neither does He at every turn sensibly interpose to prevent men from following out their own pleasure, as if it were in their power to defeat His. If this He did, the world would be governed by a constant succession of miracles. His wrath would immediately visit the wicked, and His arm exalt the humble and meek, and infallibly and instantaneously, as the interests of virtue and religion required. But this is not the method of His government. Having created responsible beings, and made known to them His will, and placed them in a probationary state, and gifted them with certain powers; instead of specially interposing on every occasion, and for each purpose—which would greatly destroy the freedom of creatures whom he created free, and supersede their responsibility whom he hath appointed to render account,—he uses them as instruments for the accomplishment of His will; permitting them to work it out, somewhat after their own

fashion; and designing to call them to account for the righteous or perverse course in which they shall have fulfilled it.

And herein consists a great difficulty in understanding the ways of Providence. Man does God's work, but he does it much in his own way. Had he continued upright, as he was formed, then every thing which he had done had been in close conformity with the divine pleasure: and, in his doings, we had seen clearly and indubitably, so far as they were concerned, the ways of Providence. But man is a fallen creature; and his proceedings are, consequently, by no means such a clear index of what God would have to be done. He is sinful, perverse, unstable, and inconsistent; and this being his character, although he cannot but fulfil the divine will, yet is it often impossible to trace that will in the midst of the ignorance, variableness, violence, and iniquity, by which man is working it out. There are many cases in Holy Scripture which might be brought forward in illustration of this part of our subject; but the instances of the patriarch Joseph, and of our blessed Redeemer, are most obviously in point. In them—had we lived at the respective

times—all that had met the eye at first was virtue oppressed and wickedness triumphant; and we could not have discerned the counsels of God in the doings of men's envy, malice, and persecution: but now we know, being taught in the Bible, that the wrath of man was in both cases working the praise of God.

It is needless to specify other reasons wherefore the course of God's providence is inscrutable to us. Enough has been said to establish the doctrine; and whilst these causes continue—that is, so long as God is infinitely wise, and man but partially so; so long as we judge of things by the narrow and imperfect rules of human experience, and maxims of human prudence and conduct; so long as God employs the instrumentality of man in carrying out his counsels—so long that which we have stated will be valid in argument, and in proof that the ways of God's Providence are past our finding out to perfection.

Having stated a few principal reasons wherefore the ways of God's Providence are unsearchable; we proceed, in the second place, to notice some lessons of wisdom which are conveyed to us in this assurance of the doctrine.

And, first, knowing ourselves to be very

limited in ability when dealing with the ways of God, it is the dictate of prudence that we presume not beyond our strength, but keep within bounds a curiosity common to us, the gratification of which however is denied us here upon earth, and may never be fully conceded. There is a multitude of subjects, the orderings of God's Providence, which it is wiser for men in general to class at once amongst "the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God," than to agitate and debate, or try to account for them. Of this nature are the permission and prevalence of evil; the unequal distribution of temporal advantages; the afflictions of the virtuous; the prosperity of the wicked. Wherever, indeed, the faith is strong, and has brought every proud thought into captivity to the revealed word of God, and is being daily strengthened by prayer and by humble walking with God and man, — such matters may be entertained and with profit; for then, without probable danger to the soul, devout and Christian meditation on them enlarges the views beyond the narrow sphere of our present existence; sets the universe and universal good before us, instead of this little world of our

habitation, and its passing and conflicting interests; raises the affections to a more perfect condition of our being, and quickens the desires for another scene, where we shall be privileged with a clearer insight into the reasons and results of the Divine government. But, ordinarily, the path of wisdom is to acquiesce in such matters, on the simple but powerful ground that they are ‘the ways of God’s Providence,’ and, as such, ‘past our finding out.’ The very attempt to explain them proceeds on the supposition that they are capable of explanation by ourselves, or others like us; and when a mind thus credulous is disappointed in the issue, as assuredly it will be, rather than rest in mystery it will perhaps take up a bold impiety, or else, failing of demonstration where it ought not to be expected, will surrender to infidel doubts and misgivings. As a *general* rule, therefore, it is wise in all such matters to set them down, without discussion, as the ‘ways of God’s Providence,’ who acts not without reason, although we may be incompetent to discover it. Mystery is but knowledge concealed. In patience let us possess our souls, and the time will come when we shall see clearly much which we can now

see through a glass only darkly; and, that we may be fit to receive greater knowledge, and that it may conduce to our happiness, and not to our shame and condemnation, let us diligently use and improve what God hath revealed, and himself deemed sufficient for us in the present stage of our being; and the knowledge and practice of which he hath ordained as necessary, and also introductory, to a more perfect enjoyment of His presence, and a more satisfactory acquaintance with His counsels and judgment.

A second lesson taught us by our subject is, that, as the ways of God's Providence are past our finding out, we ought to be very slow and cautious in pronouncing or judging concerning the same. This is a lesson which all should practise, but in which very many wofully require to be instructed. We make far too free, as it appears to me, both with the name and the ways of God. How common is it, for example sake, if a friend is wonderfully in our eyes rescued from danger, to decide at once that it is 'a Providence;' meaning not simply that it is a mercy to us, which we might well and properly account it; nor merely that it is in the

course of God's Providence; but that it is a special interposition of Almighty God in his behalf. If this mode of expression or thinking uniformly tended to the promotion of a grateful feeling in those who use it, its religious benefits might greatly plead in its excuse; but yet these would not exempt it from the charge of human presumption, or of affecting to know those ways which are past our finding out. If that friend had perished, should we also have said that it was a Providence, or a direct interposition of Almighty God? How judge we, then, in the cases? by what principle do we draw the distinction? If one were His special work, why would not the other have been? The same God "killeth, which also maketh alive." It is clear that, in this matter, we overstep the modesty which befits us, and judge of the ways of God by the rule of our finite and partial views and affections. If that take place in any extremity which *we* would have done, we confidently say that it is God's special ordering; if otherwise, we are dumb, and pass no such favourable judgment, because it is not as we would have it. Yet the Providence of God neither slumbereth nor sleepeth; "a sparrow falleth not to the

ground, without the knowledge and permission of our heavenly Father;" "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" We see alike, in either case, and only, the external event; a friend saved, or a friend lost; by this alone can we judge independently of our bias; and if by this alone, how can we decide "this hath God done, and this is not His doing."—We are not called upon to decide, or to say either; and it is only in our presumption that we so far venture. God may have specially interposed in the one case, or in the other; but this we know not: the devout way is to be thankful for those which we esteem mercies, and to be still, chastened, obedient under our visitations; without being rash with our mouths, or hasty of heart to pronounce confidently of His mysterious paths. God is in heaven, and we upon earth; let our gratitude and resignation ascend from earth to heaven; but let our words be few and our thoughts subdued, lest they break out into irreverence or presumption. It is principally, however, in the case of an enemy, that we have reason to deplore the want of that forbearance which our subject admonishes us to practise. Let reverse

of fortune, health, or other blessings, happen to one towards whom we are not kindly disposed; and how common but how wicked a practice is it, to proclaim it at once a judgment from Heaven. The person of whom we speak may be—notwithstanding our enmity, perhaps our own fault—a far worthier character in the sight of God than ourselves; yet never in his case does the suspicion cross us, that whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth: no, we see in his fall the gratification of our malevolence, and we hesitate not to pronounce that his condition is a judgment from God; as if the pure and holy Being had so far taken part in our malice as to become its executor. What sinful presumption is this! not only to affect the knowledge which is proper to God, but also confidently to pronounce that to be a punishment, which may be sent of God, in His abundant mercy, for the more thorough perfecting of one who has approved himself in his sight, and will yet come out of tribulation purified as gold in the fire! *Our* enemies are not always the enemies of God: we ourselves may be the guilty cause and entertainers of the enmity: but this we are apt to forget; and whether one has done us wrong, or we ourselves

by doing wrong have set him at variance with us; we are alike disposed to enlist God on our side, and to consider afflictions as punishments by which to avenge our private cause. That afflictions are not always to be accounted judgments, our Lord himself has plainly told us. As He was passing by, He saw a man that was blind from his birth; His disciples asked him, "Master, who did sin? this man or his parents, that he was born blind." They thought it a judgment, either upon the man's parents, or upon the man himself, for some sin committed by him in a previous state of existence: for from this passage, it appears that the Jews held the belief of the doctrine of the pre-existence of human souls, since as the man was *born* blind, it was only in some former condition of being that he could have committed sin antecedently to his blindness. This, however, by the way. Our Lord's answer is that to which I would direct attention, "Neither this man hath sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." And then, to dissipate at once all lingering suspicions which might yet remain of his being punished for some sin; He immediately imparted to him

the faculty of vision. With this miracle before us, and knowing the design with which it was wrought; instead of looking upon a neighbour's or an enemy's visitations in the light of judgments, it will be more modest, more charitable, more Christian, more profitable, to regard them either as sent in mercy for the more perfect trial of the sufferer's faith and patience, or for the promotion of gratitude in those who are spared from such troubles and sorrow; or, simply, for the manifestation of the power of God, and the consequent extension of His praise and worship.

Other and many other uses of this doctrine might be pointed out; but we shall add only, that the unsearchableness of the ways of God's Providence should subdue all fond conceit of our wisdom. With what reason can we yield to such vanity, when the profoundest learning and the longest experience are unequal to the explanation of the most ordinary occurrences of daily life; and to say of them, "this and no more nor less was God's doing, and this and no more nor less was man's." It should also forbid the practice of judging of God's love or hatred by that which is before us. "All things come

alike to all:" "there is one event to the righteous and the wicked;" "as is the good, so is the sinner." And whilst it should check our presumption and uncharitableness, the mystery of God's Providence should beget and feed an awful and habitual reverence towards Himself. "Darkness"—says a learned divine—"naturally raiseth a dread of invisible powers: we are wont to go on tremblingly, when we cannot see far before us; we regard none so much as those whose wisdom we find to overreach ours, and whose intentions we cannot sound. With God is terrible Majesty; touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out; He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of mercy; let men therefore fear him." "His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known." Like the deep waters his Providence cannot be fathomed; like the way of a ship it cannot be tracked; like one treading on the waters, where the impression is no sooner made than it is effaced; so what God doth is done, and there is no footstep to reveal the doer.

But if His way is in the sea, let us always remember also that His way is in the sanctuary,

that is, in holiness. However mysterious the proceedings of His Providence, let us never forget that He is righteous in all His ways, and holy and merciful in all His works. If we cannot solve the difficulties of His government, let them not cause us to stagger at His promises. Let us contemplate them in that devotional spirit which breathes forth in the words of our text. In this adoring frame of mind let us begin, conduct, and conclude all our inquiries. As far as our faculties can innocently carry us, we may search out God; making the Scriptures the measure as well as the guide of our reasonings. But if we find—as we undoubtedly shall—much to perplex us, let us cease from reasoning where it cannot serve, and from dogmatizing where we know not what we say, and fall down and worship Him “whose judgments are unsearchable, and ways past finding out.” He is high as heaven, what can we do? deeper than hell, what can we know? but yet let no obscurities of His Providence disturb our faith. It is written in the infallible Word, “the righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God.” Let this be our confidence and our rejoicing: but, first, let it be our character

to be *righteous* amongst the changes and chances of this mortal life; and, as the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, so let us be patient and stablish our hearts, and look for things in their season, and not out of it. The end is not now. There is an appointed time — ordained of the Same who fixed the natural seasons—to make an ampler manifestation of His government; and, when that period arrives, how plain shall be many things which have perplexed the wit of man from the foundation of the world! How consistent many orderings of His Providence which here we deemed incompatible with His immutable attributes! How just His ways, how true His word, how full of substance His everlasting promises! But the time is not yet, and it is in vain to expect it now; it will come in its season; let us wait for it, it will surely come. And, that it may not be our overwhelming, as we are fearfully and wonderfully made and preserved alive, let us walk fearfully, in faith, reverence, and obedience, amidst the doings of His Providence. “Lo!” saith holy Job, “He passeth by me, and I see Him not; He passeth on also, but I perceive Him not;” yet,

“if He but touch the mountains, they shall smoke;” and if he shoot out His arrows, man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passeth away; his body returneth to the dust from whence it came; his soul to Him who created it immortal and accountable; whose throne is in the highest heavens; who knoweth the proud afar off, but looketh with favour and mercy on that man that “is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at His word.”

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SERMON II.

THE INVISIBLE SEEN IN THE VISIBLE.

ROMANS i. part of verse 20.

For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.

IN strictness of speech we may not say, that our holy religion is capable of receiving greater authority than that which is afforded by the infallible Word of Truth. Yet to the Christian mind it must be both instructive and satisfactory to observe, that some great leading truths of Revelation are in accordance with the things which are made and ordered. It is the purpose of this discourse to shew in part that such is the case. And, in proceeding in this way, we shall only follow out the course of reasoning adopted by the Apostle. He says, “that the invisible things of God were clearly

seen from the very first, from the creation of the world, by the things which are made." The direct tendency of the passage is, that God hath never left himself without witness; but that, from the beginning, there were in nature, or creation, such evidences of God's eternal power and Godhead, that even the heathen were without excuse, when, having such means of knowing God, they glorified him not as God. The Apostle spoke, indeed, only of the being and attributes of God; and affirmed, that every intelligent and reasoning man might have arrived at the apprehension of them, or some of them, by making a wise and reverent use of "the things that are made." But we may advance farther and say, that in nature and in God's natural government there are abundant testimonies to the doctrines of Christianity; and that these facilitate the belief of those doctrines, and invest them with the highest degree of probability, and strengthen assurance that they proceed from the veritable Author of Nature and this world's economy.

First, then, in "the things that are made" there may be, and probably is, presented to us, some faint resemblance of that great mystery,

which is the stumbling-block in the way of the proud ; the confusion of the weak and presumptuous ; the adoration of the humble and believing : I mean the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine itself is, perhaps, essentially too high ever to leave altogether the throne of the God ‘who hideth himself,’ and manifest itself fully to finite intelligence. It is too sublime, perhaps, for any created faculties to receive ; yet it may be that in the things that are made, there is analogy enough to render it easy of belief to the thoughtful and ingenuous observer. To pass over what is fanciful, or at least without sanction of Scripture, we are taught of ‘man’ expressly, that he was created in the image of God. “Let us make man,” said the blessed Trinity, “in our image, and after our likeness ;” and this being the resemblance after which man was formed, St. Paul may be thought to intimate, that there is a sort of Trinity in Unity in the composition of man : “I pray God your whole *spirit* and *soul*, and *body*, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The whole unity of man is here described as consisting of spirit, soul, and body. By spirit we are to understand the superior faculties of the under-

standing, will, and conscience; by 'soul,' the inferior faculties, or animal sensations, affections, and passions, which belong to us in common with the beasts; and by the 'body,' that fleshly tabernacle which resembles theirs in being formed from the dust, and returning to the same: so that there is a Trinity in the Unity, or 'oneness' of our person. It has been objected, indeed, that St. Paul, in thus speaking of man, merely conformed himself to the popular notions to which the Thessalonians were accustomed; and that this description is by no means to be understood as bearing any philosophical exactness; but there seems to be no valid reason for making this exception. Moses evidently distinguishes between the animal and spiritual creation of man. The formation of the animal part of our nature is described, when it is said, man became 'a living soul;' the same account which is given of the beasts, 'let the earth bring forth the living creature, or the living soul after his kind, cattle and creeping thing, and the beast of the earth after his kind;' and the spiritual is clearly marked out when it is said, "God created man in his own image." The body, made of the earth, can be no part of the image of God; neither can

that animal soul of which the beasts are partakers in common with us ; it must be then in higher faculties that this resemblance is maintained. The Apostle's account agreeing with Moses's, there seems to be no reason to believe that he spoke only in compliance with vulgar notions ; and much reason to think that the distinction which he made is to be received in its literal and obvious meaning ; and, in this case, we have in the constitution of man, not indeed any proof of the doctrine of the Trinity, which we do not pretend, but still a resemblance, be it the most imperfect, in things that are made, to that which is invisible ; and which we are called upon to admit into our religious belief ; a resemblance which, however unequal, certainly falls not short of the religious doctrine in respect of mysterious union and co-operation.

Next to the doctrine of the Trinity we may notice that the all-important revelation that the spiritual and eternal welfare of man is not centred in himself, his own deservings and doings, but in the vicarious merits of Another—even our blessed Redeemer ; this, although a peculiar doctrine of the written Word, is not, nevertheless, so peculiar that it is not in a measure taught us by “ the

things which are seen" or ordered. A glance at God's natural government shews to demonstration that that principle in which we are commanded to trust for future happiness, is no other than the one which, by the ordinance of God, upholds the present world, and by which the business of this life is in ordinary conducted. The world, which we see, actually subsists by the shedding of blood,—lives on the sacrifice of innocent victims: does not this fact give a colour of assurance to the doctrine that the future well-being of man is interwoven with the offering of His precious blood "who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter?" And the virtue of a vicarious agency, about which there is so much controversy, however incomprehensible in certain points; yet is not the doctrine broadly declared in the fact that society is upheld and kept together by this same principle? and that generally people are indebted to others for the good or evil which comes to them. Parents work not for themselves only, or chiefly, but for their families; servants for their masters; masters for their servants and the community; patriots for their country; even the sensualist cannot indulge in his selfishness without work-

ing for others, nor the miser heap up his riches so as alone to be benefited. There is scarcely such a possibility as that of a man acting for himself alone. He may contemplate so doing; he may ignorantly think that it is the case; but that which he does has, of necessity and by the constituted order of this world's government, and independently of his own will, an influence beyond; and his neighbour is well or ill affected by it. So that vicarious agency is, as it were, the marrow of the social body; for if it were destroyed, the whole fabric would be dissolved. And this being the prevalence and virtue of vicarious agency; it is no strange doctrine, but one in a measure set before us by daily experience, that One should suffer in our steads, and that by "His stripes we should be healed."

A third fundamental doctrine of revealed religion is, that in our birth-state we are, as spiritual beings, destitute and helpless; that all of spiritual good which we have, we receive of another—even of God; that of ourselves we can do nothing, but that we depend upon another, even God, for will and ability in heavenly things; that all spiritual graces are derived; that the germ of spiritual life is imparted to us

in baptism; that it then needs to be watered with the constant dews of God's grace; and that we ourselves must be taught of God, or we shall know nothing as we ought to know. Now—however humbling this view may be to the pride of man, who would constitute himself the author of his own moral goodness, as well as the maker and builder of his worldly fortunes; yet it certainly is supported by the evidence of things 'that are seen;' man is unquestionably born into *this* world naked, weak, helpless, ignorant, dependent; and in this state he continues longer than other animals, who are soon able to provide for their sustenance and safety; and, whatever may be his ultimate proficiency, his first impressions are received, his first principles are derived. Now these facts cannot be thought to oppose the doctrine that when he enters on another relationship of being, namely, the spiritual, he is in like circumstances of destitution; and that whatever he has of spiritual good is in the first instance imparted and conveyed by another—even the Spirit of God; of whose gift alone it cometh that we render acceptable service, and by whose grace it is that we 'are what we are.'

In connexion with this doctrine we may mention another, which is also borne out by the testimony of things 'that are seen.' The tenor of Scripture gives us plainly to understand that this present life is not man's final destiny, but only a state of probation and discipline for another. And this being taught us in the Word of God, is it much exaggeration to say, that human life—even when carried out to its greatest extent—is treated by human beings themselves as somewhat still progressive. It has been said by a heathen writer, that no man is so old as to think that he cannot live another year; and, granting that exceptions may be taken to this assertion in the cases of some few, whose infirmities may warn them that their days are definitely numbered; yet, so generally, as to be almost universally—there is to the very end the contemplation of somewhat future, and something yet to be done, or yet to be enjoyed. The mind is never satiated with devising and purposing, as if it had realized what it is capable of compassing. And this state continuing to the end, would appear to be the pointing of nature itself to another sphere or state of action, as truly as the pantings of childhood for youth, and

of youth for manhood, are indications that there are really such stages in advance. And if any object to the doctrine of human life being altogether only a preparatory condition of existence, on the ground of the great expenditure of time which, in this case, is appropriated to discipline; let him consider again "the things that are seen;" how such waste, as he thinks it, actually does exist, and how clearly the character of discipline is stamped on human life; how absolutely childhood and youth are devoted to this end; how long it is before man enters on life, as the phrase is, attains to anything like a just knowledge of his powers, a mature exercise of his judgment; what great proportion of three-score years and ten is spent in weakness, and in learning to live; and how long it is, in the ordinary course, before he reaps advantage from what he has been for years sowing and cultivating. Surely, it is as credible, that the whole of human life should be a preparation for eternity; as it is, that the choice and greatest portions of it should be a preparation for old age; especially when we consider how many are cut off before they have attained to old age, or reaped any earthly recompense for their

pains; and how few of those who are spared to the utmost, are content with their gain; or else are able to rejoice in the fruits of their labours, their vigour of mind and body having become impaired by the previous and necessary discipline and trial.

But further—it is the doctrine of Holy Scripture, that faith and conduct, and a right faith and right conduct, are necessary to salvation. “The things which are made or ordered,” echo this teaching of the word of God. As to faith, it is not only “the just that lives by it”—it is the life of man as a temporal being. He has not certainty in anything beyond the present moment. It is in faith that he sows, labours, and embarks in any proceeding, or makes provision for the morrow; and this faith is not merely a speculative belief, but a practical trust and confidence; and is constituted of God so necessary, that without it man would be not only figuratively, but literally dead or extinct; his energies paralysed, and his supplies of food and defence cut off. The visible world proclaims the importance of faith, and evidently of conduct also; for in this life, as we are taught of the next, profit and loss are the consequences

of our behaviour. "But the things which are made," teach us more of the Scriptural doctrine; even the importance of both, a right faith, and a right conduct; for what becomes of a man who, in this life, acts consistently with false principles, or inconsistently with right ones? If a man commit murder, in the firm belief that by removing one hostile to the interests of virtue and religion, he shall do God service; or, if another commit a fraud, in the thorough conviction that it is lawful to do a little evil for a great good; will the laws deal leniently with the parties because they acted respectively according to principles, false and wicked, but which they believed to be sound and just? But, perhaps, it will be answered, that what the laws and human opinion may decree, is no certain and satisfactory evidence in the matter; seeing that they are variable and fallible: well, then, how does nature herself, undoubtedly God's work and will, deal with those in this life who act consistently with wrong principles? Take the most venial case—that of a thoughtless youth, who really believes that sensual pleasure is the thing to be sought first, and who, consistently with such belief,

gives himself up to vice and dissipation: will nature make allowances for his error in belief? does she not, on the contrary, inflict punishment to the utmost; and inflexibly exact it in the ruin of health and strength, and never relent, year after year, and long perhaps after the offence is forgotten? “The things that are seen,” shew that in this life there is no safety to a man who acts consistently with false principles; and it is needless to dwell on the other case, that of one acting inconsistently with right principles; for whilst he is, in like manner, subject to the same penalties at the hands of men and of nature, there is additional punishment in the reproaches of conscience, and in the world’s abhorrence of hypocrisy.

Another doctrine of Scripture, and also taught “by the things that are made,” is that the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness. Now, as the whole world lieth in wickedness, it might have been thought that this truth would have been but faintly and feebly exhibited in the world; or, at least, in the judgment of the world itself; so that assurance of it should have been left to be almost, if not altogether, collected from the written Word. On the contrary, how-

ever, this doctrine is most vividly and forcibly presented “in the things that are made, or ordered.” Although “the whole world lieth in wickedness,” and the heart of man is prone to iniquity, and his lusts and passions are all enlisted on its side, and would lead him to think lightly of it and deal leniently with it; yet it is so ordered of God that in “the things which are seen,” that which is universally loved and followed is universally condemned. “In this world which lieth in wickedness,”—in the first place, vice, as simple and naked vice, without any pretence, or implication, or imagination of virtue, has never been sanctioned and established by the legislature of any land: besides this, it is not the road to worldly respect and honour; it is not admired; conscience condemns it; the laws are made to prevent it; it is universally reprobated, for every man hates his neighbour’s vice, although he may love his own. And this which is ‘seen’ not here and there only, but more or less throughout the world, and in spite of men’s pleasure; cannot be considered as other than marks set in the visible world, by which we may learn the indignation with which sin is beheld by the invisible God.

The only other doctrine to which I shall particularly advert, as illustrated and rendered easy of belief by “the things that are seen,” is this; we are taught that, after this life, we shall enter on a state of existence very dissimilar to the present, and ourselves be endowed with bodiès and powers different from what we now have. In the things that are made or ordered, not only in the insect tribe, but in every germ that has animal or vegetable life in it, we are furnished with illustrations of the doctrine. We *sow* not the body that shall be, but bare, naked grain: how unlike is it to the blade which is produced? how unlike is an acorn to an oak? an egg to the living animal? Or, let us take our own instance, our condition before we were born into the world; the vast changes which we have since undergone; and how, along with the bodily ones, there have been corresponding changes in our minds, views, and desires: and do not the things that ‘are seen’ bear witness that scarcely can any change be greater than that which we have already gone through? and ought not our experience of the one to strengthen our confidence of the other? Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should

raise the dead? No man can shew by any analogy that death is in any case the destruction of the living principle. Why, then, should not God give to the living principle of man a body as it pleaseth Him, and raise in incorruption, glory, power, and spirituality, that which, only like other things, has been sown in the course of nature, in corruption, dishonour, and weakness? God hath ordained that each particular seed shall reproduce its own body, but in a more glorious state—why should the imperishable, indestructible seed in man be alone excepted from the universal law of renovation?

Much more might be added “from the things which are made, or ordered,” in illustration of the invisible things of God. The vast varieties and different proportions of temporal gifts which are given to men; the various ranks and descriptions of human society; cannot at least be thought to detract from the doctrine that there are also many mansions in heaven. The waste and abuse with which men are chargeable in respect of their natural blessings, cannot be thought to oppose the solemn revelation, that of “the many called” few shall be chosen to everlasting favour, by reason of their thankful

and dutiful entertainment of God's spiritual blessings. And, as in the one case, God is never reproached as Himself being the Author of such abuse, so is there no authority to impute as His doing the perdition of souls, ruined by the same wilfulness and wickedness. And, again, as in this life virtue is held in honour by the will of God and in defiance of man's perverseness; we may confidently look for increase of honour when no such hindrance shall abound. And as in this world we perceive that punishment does not always tread closely on transgression, but is sometimes delayed for a long time; and comes by winding paths, or is steadily and surely working its way in secret, when all things bear the outward appearance of safety: so any delay of divine wrath may not be used as presumptive of final impunity; but should confirm the revelation, that "although sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily and the sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet it shall not be well with him."

The brief review which we have now taken of the subject proposed, ought not to be without its religious use. It is an attempt to confirm

the truth of religion from the evidence which every man has in the world which he inhabits. I have endeavoured to shew that, in sundry leading particulars, there is in nature and in God's natural government a transcript of certain important doctrines, which we hold as Christians. It certainly cannot minish the Christian's satisfaction to find that much which he is taught in the Bible is also taught in the sensible world of God's creation and ordering. This affords a fair presumption that both nature and the written revelation proceeded from the one God, "with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning;" and that the Author of our holy religion is no other than the Author of this world's economy. And this is a satisfaction in which other than the Christian cannot share, or can share only in part. The Atheist cannot point us to a world stamped with his morals and doctrine. The world which he inhabits, and with which alone he is acquainted, bespeaks an intelligent and invisible First Cause of all things which he denies. The government under which he is obliged to dwell condemns what his creed approves, and extols what his creed degrades. The Deist can but partially use the

argument, for the world which he inhabits is conducted by vicarious agency, and lives on the death of the guiltless; and these are principles which he excludes from the articles of his faith. The Christian can adopt this analogy and carry it out to much greater extent; and the "Christian indeed," may rejoice in its contemplation. It is somewhat to have the assurance of sense that those principles by which we are commanded to live for eternity, are the same by which we must live for present happiness. It is somewhat to know that the principles on which we depend for eternal salvation, are the same which from the creation have been in real operation, and by which this world's welfare is insured. It is somewhat to know that we have not two different and conflicting books to read, and out of which to learn; but that nature and the Bible so far agree, that the one may be taken as a commentary on the other. It is somewhat to know that in the school in which we are placed, there are written around us in legible characters some chief of those doctrines which we are commanded to learn and to practise as a qualification for the kingdom of heaven.

Whilst, however, we add this reasoning to the overwhelming evidences by which the Christian faith is established, let us be, above all things, careful that we put out our conviction to usury, in the increase of faith and practice. The Apostle tells us in our chapter, that even the heathen were 'without excuse;' because that, when they had the means of "knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." *Their* means, compared with ours, were but as the feeble light of a taper to the meridian blaze of the sun; and yet they were 'without excuse,' because they were unthankful. Unthankfulness is here put for irreligion itself—Oh, may not we be charged with it! Let us walk as those who have been created, redeemed, and sanctified by the Triune God. We are a Trinity in ourselves; let us conform ourselves to that image of moral excellence, after which we were created, and by which we are distinguished from the beasts that perish. We see, from the way in which this life is upheld, that the doctrine of vicarious agency and sacrifice is a real principle in operation, and no fanciful imagination of the divine; a real principle in the visible world which God

hath made. Let us trust to it as an equally real and vital principle in religion, and put our faith in Him who gave himself for us. We see, from the circumstances of our natural birth, that God doth not intend man to be an independent creature; let us daily look up to Him for supplies of spiritual health and strength. We see that a right faith and practice are demanded for our present welfare; let us hold fast the faith 'once delivered unto the saints' in a pure conscience. We see that sin is condemned by those who love it; let us dread it as intolerable to Him that cannot look upon iniquity. We see that delay of punishment is no evidence of escape from it; let us fly to repentance, lest our sins find us out at the last, and be set in frightful array before us. We see that this life is naturally marked as a state of discipline; let us dedicate it to the training of ourselves in spirit and affections for the kingdom of God. We see that there are different estates of being here below, and that there are few comparatively who thankfully entertain God's natural blessings, and reap the utmost advantage from them; let this warn us with effect that the joys of heaven are not to be had

for the simple asking. We see that all things which live, die and see corruption, and dying, live; be it our labour and prayer 'to die daily unto sin,' and 'to live unto the Lord,' that through the vicarious offering, and all prevailing intercession of the Saviour, we may attain unto the resurrection of the just.

SERMON III.

DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL.

MATTHEW xxvi. part of verse 39.

*O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass
from me.*

It is a question with some religious persons, whether it is lawful to pray for deliverance from those evils which beset us in our passage through life. It is certain that those evils are permitted of God, if they be not purposely ordered of him for some wise and special end; and it is certain, moreover, that all things, including what we call “evils,” work together for good to them that fear God. And, these points being established beyond controversy, it is a doubt with some whether prayer for deliverance from evil does not partake of a presumptuous, unbelieving, and rebellious spirit.

But such persons appear to proceed on erroneous and partial notions of the reasons and

uses of prayer. As we do not pray to God to make him acquainted with our wants; for He himself knoweth all things, and needeth not that any should tell him; so neither is it the proper design of prayer to bend Him from his purpose, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning:” although it should be always borne in mind that the Divine Will may be one thing if we pray, and another and very different if we pray not. These, however, are not the just reasons of prayer. We pray to God because it is dutiful, and reverential, and promotive of inward holiness; and in token of our sense of constant dependence on Him, and need of Him; and it ought also to be in evidence of our cheerful submission to His dispensations: and it is only when this last disposition is wanting, that any just exception can be taken to the practice in question. If we beseech God in absolute terms for any particular deliverance, we take upon ourselves to speak unto him as doth not become us, and to dictate to Him who both knoweth, deviseth, and bringeth to pass, that which is best: but if the prayer be felt and breathed in a temper of entire confidence in His wisdom and benevolence, and of un murmuring

resignation to the answer which He may vouchsafe; then may we plead, in justification of the practice, both the examples and precepts of the holiest men in the church of Christ. The Apostle Paul, suffering under the buffeting of Satan, besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him: and his resignation to the divine will was manifested in his confession, that "that thorn in the flesh was given him lest he should be exalted above measure." When Peter was kept in prison, prayer was made 'without ceasing' of the church of God for him. "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray," saith St. James. "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him: the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much." "In *every* thing," saith the Apostle to the Philippians, "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

We might safely abide by these precedents and commandments, and they undoubtedly authorize prayer, under submission to the divine will, for deliverance from evil. But our Lord himself hath sanctioned the practice both by precept and example.. He hath taught us to

pray, "Deliver us from evil;" and Himself in the garden of Gethsemane, besought God, "O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

I purpose to remark further on these words selected for the text; not simply for the reason already given, but because they instruct us of what *spirit* our prayer should be; and also because—as the answer returned to our Lord's Prayer agreed not with the natural wish—the consideration of the result ought to reconcile us to like disappointments, if they be the orderings of God's providence and wisdom.

Our Lord prayed, "O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." This was evidently a beseeching God for deliverance from impending sufferings. It was on the part of our blessed Saviour, an expression of His natural will. He was "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God," but he was also 'man'; and, as man, possessed a human will, and the senses and affections which belong to our nature. From the manger to the cross He was "man," as well as God; and if any comparison may be at all instituted, when can we pronounce that He was more truly man, than when He was

deserted by his heavenly Father; “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me:” His human nature left in its acutest sensitiveness to feel infinitely beyond all that human nature before or since sustained; and the usual manifestations of divine support withdrawn, that he alone might bear the iniquity of us all. This season had not, indeed, yet arrived, but it was full in prospect before him. He was in the garden of Gethsemane; His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; His body prostrate on the earth; His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. He foresaw his betrayal by Judas; his denial by Peter; his condemnation as a blasphemer; his execution as one seditious. He heard, as it were, the mockings and revilings of the priests, the people, and soldiers; he witnessed, as it were, the cruel indignities which would be passed on Him; he felt, as it were, the buffetings of his sacred person, the piercings of the crown of thorns, the weight of that cross which, faint and bleeding, he should bear. But all this—grievous and multiplied as it was, and surpassing our conception of its burden and pain, was yet, it is thought, but a very inconsiderable portion of that which

constituted our Lord's agony. It is supposed that at this particular period of our Lord's ministry "the powers of darkness" were permitted to assail Him with their utmost force and malignity; and that they exerted all their strength and craft to cause Him to renounce His gracious purpose. The circumstances of the narrative do certainly afford much probability to this opinion; especially as our Lord himself described this season as the "hour of his enemies, and the power of darkness;" which might well imply, that then emphatically both devils and men leagued against Him, and were permitted of God to work their utmost malice. Can we wonder that his human nature shrunk for a moment before such realities, and such anticipations? Shall we use His prayer as any argument of His distrust in His heavenly Father, or of any want of love to us? How could confidence in His heavenly Father be more fully displayed, than by His going forth to do His will in the keenest consciousness of those infinite pains and griefs which awaited Him? How could His love be better approved as love, than by His freely pursuing His merciful object, when all the details of the price and sacrifice

required on His part were thus vividly present before Him ; and the malice of men and hell would have diverted Him from His most gracious work ?

But, secondly, this prayer, instructing us that it is lawful to beseech God for deliverance from evil, teaches us also on what conditions it is lawful. “O my Father ! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” By the words “if it be possible,” our Lord could not have signified any mistrust of God’s power ; for the version given us by St. Mark is, “Abba, Father ; all things are possible unto thee :” and in a few verses after the text, our Lord expressed himself in words to the same effect, “thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ?” These words do not allow us to imagine that any doubt of God’s power is implied by the expression ‘if it be possible.’ The just sense to be attached to them seems to be the following—“if it can be consistently with thy divine counsels ; if there be any other mode by which the salvation of mankind can be effected ; any other way equally just, and wise, and effectual.” And may we not believe—consider-

ing the infinite love which Christ bore to our race—that there was included also a devout wish, that ‘if it were possible’ his atonement might be accomplished without so great wickedness on the part of those whose salvation he desired.

It must be allowed, indeed, that the prayer, even with this explanation, betrayed somewhat of human weakness; for He who “was with the Father in the beginning,” and “knew all that was coming upon him,” could not but know that ‘without shedding of blood,’ there is no remission; and that He himself was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and that His obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, was necessary to His own exceeding exaltation in His human nature. And, being thus intimately acquainted with the divine decrees, and the nature and duties of His own office, and the point on which the salvation of man depended, His prayer was to the effect that that which he knew to be fixed and good might, ‘if possible,’ be changed: but yet have we cause to be thankful that such a prayer did ever proceed from the lips of our blessed Redeemer; for herein have we evidence

that "He was tempted like as we are, yet without *sin*;" for no sooner did He give the sentiment utterance, than He reduced it into subjection to the pleasure of God — "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." And hence gather we assurance that He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and that, if human nature should in like manner, through weakness or inadvertence, overstep the bounds of dutiful resignation, He will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss, if we check its presumption with like promptitude and decision. "Thy will be done," is the voice of grace when it has triumphed over nature; it is the prayer of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect; and is rarely breathed in an earthly atmosphere in its purity and thoroughness of devotion. "Let this cup pass from me" is again the voice of unrestrained nature, impatient of the ways of God. But the prayer of our Lord altogether, as a whole, and as it was delivered, is admirably adapted to us as men and Christians. It has sympathy with that humanity in which we are clothed, and from the affections of which we cannot hope to be exempt whilst dwelling in this fleshly

tabernacle; it has grace in it, according to the ordinary measure of the gift of Christ—"O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And, being our blessed Saviour's prayer, we cannot err if we take it as the model whereby to fashion our own.

In seasons of distress, therefore, let us speak unto God as our Father. He is never more our Father than when He chasteneth us for our good; for "what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Christ even in his agony, did not forget nor withhold this most endearing name and privilege. He addressed God, "O my Father!" being peculiarly and singularly His well-beloved son; and he hath taught us 'brethren' to use the more comprehensive form 'our' Father. Let no prospect of evil, no depth of affliction, no extremity of sorrow, no sullenness of nature, so prevail as to cause us to lay aside the same dutiful and encouraging mode of address. It will embolden us to make a free and full disclosure of our wants and griefs, it will also remind us of our bounden subjection to the 'Father of spirits;' and check complaint of his parental doings. Therefore, let us say, "Father,

if it be possible," if it accord with thy government, if it be good for my soul; and good for others of whose interests I may be ignorant, and of which I am too prone to be little mindful; "Let this cup pass from me;" grant me deliverance from this evil which oppresses or threatens: "nevertheless"—and that we may say the words with meaning, and that they may speak before Him, "who knoweth the thoughts," the language of our hearts; let us discipline ourselves to humble thinking of our own wisdom and to boundless confidence in the government and benevolence of God—"nevertheless not my will but thine be done." Let my prayer be answered not according to the prudence of one so short-sighted as I am, so prone to earth and earthly things; so blind to the future; so perverse in will; but according to thy pleasure, who commandedst the light to shine out of darkness, in wrath rememberest mercy, and desirest the happiness of all and each, and hast sought the same even at the price of the precious blood of thy well-beloved Son.

But here it may be objected, if the prayer be not answered, as we desire; if the cup may not pass from us, except we drink it: wherein is the

efficacy of prayer, and wherewith shall we comfort ourselves? On this supposition, our case will be one with that of our blessed Saviour. His prayer was not answered to the gratification of the human will; but was it therefore void? How read we in the Scripture? St. Luke saith, "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening him." This was miraculous, and we may not look for the same visible succour. But may we not look for some relief? Are the promises of God of none effect to those who in faith and penitence put their trust in them? It is written, "ask, and ye shall receive;" "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him—to all that call upon him in truth; He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them." Are these vain words? do they hold forth deceitful expectations? God forbid! Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar. When we have unburdened our griefs to One that careth for us, and is able to save to the uttermost; when, in faith and humility, we have placed ourselves and ours at His supreme disposal, we feel that we have entrusted our cause to better hands, and that we are not single armed for the con-

flict; and we go forth against our troubles, if not with a song of triumph, yet with assurance of victory; and with a firmness and courage which were before unknown. Our Saviour's prayer was not answered, so that the cup passed from him; but yet, subsequently to his prayer, he exhibited a dignity, constancy, and composure which, at the season of His prayer, were less manifest. And of this we have ample proof. When, for instance, the multitude from the chief priests came to apprehend him, and expedite his death, he promptly demanded, "whom seek ye?" and when they said "Jesus of Nazareth," he boldly answered, 'I am he.' When Simon Peter sought to rescue him by force from those sufferings, the contemplation of which in the garden had plunged Him into unspeakable agony; He gently rebuked him, "Put up again thy sword into its place; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" When false witnesses testified against him, he answered nothing. When he was mocked, and spit upon, and blindfolded, and buffeted, and crowned with bloody thorns,—he could bear all, not even a murmur passed from his sacred lips. He that in the garden was exceeding sorrowful

at the prospect of his own sufferings, when bearing his cross could restrain the grief of others—" Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me!" He that in the garden prayed for himself; on the cross had so far recovered equability and magnitude of soul that he prayed for his murderers, promised paradise to the dying penitent, and made provision for his Virgin Mother. And this change, observable in our Lord's bearing subsequently to his prayer, is evidence that his prayer was not in vain, although it was not answered as He at the time desired. And so may the believer trust, that if his natural will be disappointed, and the cup of evil or suffering pass not away from him, yet shall his prayer—if it be sent forth in humility and faith, although clogged with human infirmity—bring down from heaven both strength and comfort, so that he shall not only be able to bear his griefs, but to rejoice with a holy joy under that burden which it may please his heavenly Father to impose.

But this is not the only benefit which the prayer of faith may expect. The Apostle in his Epistle to the Philippians, instructs us, that because "of Christ's obedience unto death, even the death of the cross (to which, as we have

seen, His natural will was opposed), God hath highly exalted Him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We learn from this passage that a peculiar exaltation was given to our Saviour, by reason of his humility; which exaltation had not belonged to him if the cup had passed away without his drinking it. Let the true Christian, hence, reason and believe, that if it be the will of God that he should pass through much tribulation, there is greater glory in reserve. Let him "look unto Jesus, the Man of Sorrows," but who is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. We see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; if we suffer with Him, let us strive that it may be in such a temper of confidence in our heavenly Father, and of peaceful resignation; that our light affliction, which is but for a moment—if time and the evils of time be compared with the joys of an endless futurity—may work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Never

let us yield to any suspicion of the word and promises of God ; if the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are they to whom those promises belong. We know that earthly benefactors often deny our ignorant requests, in the conviction that they are hurtful ; and others defer their good offices, that they may be more effectually rendered in the end. Let us thus think and believe of God. His wisdom and benevolence are established beyond the reach of a reasonable doubt, by His word, His providence, and the great scheme of redemption. If misgivings arise, let us check them at once by the might of these undisputed attributes. What is our present life ? “ it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” If we preserve our integrity, every evil shall vanish with it ; every sorrow shall gain a blessing ; and every prayer, denied to our natural will, shall be found to have been answered as was most expedient for us.

We have now noticed the principal uses of that portion of our Lord’s prayer in the garden which was selected for meditation ; and, in proceeding, we have made some application for the benefit of righteous believers. We have heard

that it is lawful to beseech God for deliverance from evils, and on what condition. We have heard too that which should comfort us, if our petitions be not answered according to our imperfect desires. If there be any here present who are in trouble, sorrow, need, or any other adversity ;—alas ! where in this chequered scene can we congregate with any number of our fellow creatures, and find them all exempt from the griefs and complaints of humanity ? Rarely can we mix in society without encountering some of the outward trappings of woe ; still more rarely, if we could read hearts, should we meet with breasts free from the harassings of the painful changes and chances of this mortal life. It is no groundless imagination, therefore, that there may be some present in such circumstances of disquiet. I have set before them our Lord's demeanour in his season of extreme affliction. May they learn from his example whither to fly for refuge ; and how to bear their sorrows, to the approval of their God, and the welfare of their souls. They have often heard that 'suffering' is very ordinarily the portion of the righteous ; that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth : " that which they have heard was

verified, as we have seen, and to the very utmost, and beyond all mortal endurance, in the case of our Redeemer. From the manger to the cross there was naught in his lot to gratify the human will; and yet He was the well-beloved, the only-begotten of the Father.

The cup of suffering is a bitter draught, and often is it given to the righteous to be drained to its very dregs; but are not the giving of the cup to them, and the stern exaction that they drink it, a most convincing argument that “verily, there must be a reward to the righteous.” And have not their fortitude and constancy and cheerfulness under it furnished us with the strongest proof of the reality of those promises of grace and strength which religion sets forth. If in this life only we had hope, we could not believe, on any principles which we can form of God, that he would suffer the most dutiful of his children and the chief benefactors of their race, to labour under those evils which often fall to their lot, and from which the wicked often altogether escapè. Oh! when we take the Prophets for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience; let us take them also as evidences of a future and more

glorious state of being : and let us learn, like them, to look through our troubles to their design and end ; and to keep our souls fixed, as they did, on the recompense of reward. They regarded human life as a journey, a school, a foreign land, a pilgrim's passage ; an Eden of pleasure and profit indeed to the soul, but abounding in forbidden fruit, and they looked through time to eternity, through present denial to the amplest fruition ; and thus did they bear up under the burden of this life's sorrows, and preserve their integrity, and approve themselves to their God and Saviour. And if they were indebted to religion, religion is also indebted to them for having so greatly adorned its profession, and so practically taught us its worth and power in the extremity of human destitution. Let us strive, in like manner, to serve God in our generation by making manifest to men the beauty and virtue of religion, in whatever circumstances of trial it may please Him to place us. No temptation hath taken us, or shall take us, but such as is common to man ; in patience let us possess our souls, and the will of God shall be done in our sanctification now, and in our salvation in the world to come.

SERMON IV.

OUR LORD'S MIRACLES AND PARABLES.

LUKE viii. 10.

And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others, in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

THERE are two particulars in the method of our Lord's proceedings whilst he was upon the earth, which can hardly have failed in attracting the attention of the careful reader of the New Testament. They are these: first, our Lord does not appear ever to have wrought a miracle for the express purpose of creating faith in those who partook of the benefits of the miracle, or in those who were witnesses of it; and, secondly, in addressing the mixed multitude, our Lord preferred the medium of parables, whereas to his own disciples he spake

plainly, either without parable, or by exposition of parable.

I purpose to remark on both these particulars; not simply, because they may seem at variance with the manner of proceeding which the promulgator of a new religion would have pursued, but principally, because of the important instruction which is conveyed to us in the course which our Lord adopted.

First, then, examination of our Lord's miracles will convince us that He did not work them for the *creation* of faith in the minds of the unbelieving. Their object seems to have been uniformly, if not exclusively, the confirmation of faith in the believing; not the production of faith in the unbelieving. There does not appear to have been one wrought with the express design of converting an infidel, although such conversion doubtless frequently followed as a result. If they were not wrought for the confirmation of faith in our Lord's immediate disciples, they were wrought for the confirmation of faith in the believing spectators. Where these ends do not appear to have been contemplated, our Lord does not seem to have had in view the creation of faith in the unbelieving,

but simply the manifestation of His power, authority, benevolence. This account is satisfactorily supported by an investigation of our Lord's recorded works. And it is additionally confirmed by sundry facts and declarations which have been delivered down to us. Thus we read that our Lord wrought "no more miracles" in certain places, because of the people's unbelief: if the object of miracles had been to create belief, unbelief could hardly have been assigned as the reason or motive for abstaining from them. Again, before our Lord effected a miraculous cure, the inquiry very commonly was, "*believest* thou that I can do this?" and then the answer, "according to thy faith (not to thy unbelief) be it unto thee." And, moreover, if the direct design of our Lord's miracles had been to convert unbelievers, we see not on what principle our Lord did not gratify Herod, who "hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him," when, by the witness of a miracle, he might have been convinced, and his conversion would have greatly aided the cause of the Gospel in its first rise. Neither, if such had been the proper design of miracles, can we so clearly perceive wherefore our Lord,

after his resurrection, forbore to manifest himself to his unbelieving enemies.

Thus much must suffice as to the former of the two particulars noticed. The second is, that, whilst our Lord taught the multitude by parables, it was to his disciples chiefly, if not only, that he vouchsafed an exposition of them. Many reasons may be assigned for our Lord's employment of parables as a vehicle of instruction; but that which merits particular attention is, the reason or ground wherefore our Lord committed them to the multitude without exposition. Now, on a certain occasion, when great multitudes were gathered together, and He spake many things unto them in parables, the disciples came to our Lord and put the very question, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" Our Lord answered and said unto them, "Because unto *you* it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing, see not; and hearing, hear not, neither

do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing; and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." I have quoted the whole of this passage, because of the ample explanation which it gives of the matter under consideration. The substance, however, is contained in our text--"unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others, in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Now in this account, given by our Lord himself, in explanation of His proceeding with the multitude by parable, the reasons most prominently set forth are, "because seeing they saw not, and hearing they understood not;" and, "because it was not given them to understand." By the expression "it was not given them to understand," we are not

at liberty to say, that by any decree of God, or judicial sentence, they were precluded from understanding; for in this case it would scarcely have consisted with His wisdom—who Himself gave the precept ‘cast not your pearls before swine’—that he should have taught them either by parable or otherwise, seeing that the labour would have been on this supposition necessarily in vain. The expression ‘it is not given to understand,’ is satisfactorily explained in the terms of that prophecy, which they fulfilled; “their heart was waxed gross, their ears were dull of hearing,” and they, and not God, had “closed their eyes.” In a word, they were carnal-minded, and as such had not the eye to see, nor the ear to hear with profit to their souls.

But, surely, some one may be ready to object if this were so; if the multitudes were thus dull and blind; this would be the very reason wherefore our Lord should have spoken to them plainly and not in parables; since if things had been made easier to them, and readier to their apprehension, they might have understood and been converted. It is sufficient to answer, that, whatever we may think, the course preferred by our Lord was that of speaking to the

multitude in parables; and, as we may be sure that this course was agreeable to heavenly wisdom, and that it was *deliberately* adopted, our Lord himself having justified it; it is easy to trace its consistency, or to shew its agreement with the principle on which our Lord proceeded in the dispensing of His *miracles*. Who so much in need of plain speaking, we may ask, as the dull of hearing and slow of understanding? Yet to these our Lord addressed himself in parable. Who so much in need of a miracle, as the unbelieving? Yet for their sakes expressly, no miracle was wrought. And, in both cases, we may believe that our Lord had respect to one rule; and also acted in conformity with the economy of God's ordinary Providence. In both cases he had regard to the character and dispositions of men; and, in both cases, he forbore to cast his precious pearls before swine. He wrought his miracles for the benefit of believers; he explained his parables for the edification of the same. He wrought his miracles: and unbelievers might profit by them—although they were not specially designed for their service—if they would examine and yield to evidence. He delivered his parables

that the means of instruction might be within the reach of all or any who would improve their opportunities. But wherever there was a stubborn Herod who would not employ or bend to the *ordinary* means of conviction, there a miracle was denied: and wherever there was a hardened hearer, or a careless listener, receiving his words as a sieve receives water, there a parable was left unexplained, and the party 'to see without seeing' and 'hear without understanding,' unless he himself was disposed to examine and seek farther information. But wherever there was that docile, humble, inquiring disposition which characterised his disciples, and which led the hearer of his words to dive into their sense; unto him it *was* given to see what he saw, and understand what he heard. And this, the Saviour's method, was according to that which we observe in the government of God's Providence. Whosoever had, to him was given more abundantly; whosoever had not, from him was taken away even that which he had. The believer had a miracle to *establish* the honest conviction of his mind: he that was without faith was left to the usual means of conversion; or, at least, a miracle was not

vouchsafed in his express behalf. Those again, who were fitly disposed to profit by divine truth had the parables expounded to them: the careless and uninquisitive were suffered to continue in their ignorance; and, by degrees, the little good which the unexplained parable might have produced was effaced. He that had 'ears to hear,' was the only one whom the Saviour condescended to instruct more fully.

Having examined our Lord's established method in respect both of his miracles and parables, we are furnished with certain inferences of the first importance in a practical point of view.

From the circumstance that our Lord, during his personal ministry, wrought not his miracles for the purpose of converting unbelievers, but rather for the establishment of the faith of the believing; unbelievers of the present day are warned not to expect, much less to depend upon, any special or extraordinary means of conviction. There are some living in a state of infidelity, and of obstinate resistance to the evidences of religion; and in habitual contempt of those practices and dispositions by which belief and godliness would be promoted; and

who continue in this way possessed of the undisturbed persuasion that conviction and salvation shall one day be forced upon them by some miracle, of God's grace or providence, wrought in their special behalf, and irresistible in its consequence. The case is most distressing to a Christian mind; and, especially, if it be exhibited in the person of a friend or relative. We set the Gospel before them; we implore them to study it with a sincere desire to be guided into truth, and with prayer for that help and illumination which come down from the Father of lights; we make them acquainted with the varied description of evidences by which the Bible is supported; above all, we endeavour to impress on them that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," and that the *practice* of Christianity is the most certain path to the apprehension of its divine source. But, often, our efforts are altogether in vain. The conceit has got hold of them, that notwithstanding their wickedness, which they do not disguise, they are yet such characters that God, rather than suffer them to perish, will one day specially interpose to pluck them as brands out of the burning. Oh! if there be any such present,

let me beseech them to cast aside all such vain and unwarrantable dependence. If they are such as I have described, they are the very *last* persons in whose behalf we have any reason to presume that Almighty God will specially interpose. If our Saviour Christ were now on the earth, we may believe, judging by the course which he actually pursued, that he would not work a miracle for their express use, even if by its means they might be converted and save their souls: how, then, can they expect it, now that he has ascended into heaven, and left his religion with more various and systematic, if not more striking testimonies of its divinity, than were set before men in the season of his earthly sojourn; and formally committed it, without the aid of sensible miracle, to the acceptance or rejection of men, accordingly as they improve or abuse the ministration of that Spirit whom he hath substituted for himself as the Guide and Comforter of the church? Such dependence is unwarrantable, moreover, because it is not borne out by the instances of those early converts, for whose sake miracles were undoubtedly wrought; for these had been previously men of very different characters 'given to prayers and alms;'

‘devout men;’ and ‘living in all good conscience.’ It is unwarrantable, too, because if they who abused their present means of conviction could confidently look for greater, there would be change and caprice in His counsels “with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning;” for the rule of His government would then be reversed, and to him that hath not would be given more abundantly. And it is unwarrantable, because it would make God in some degree the author of sin; forasmuch as grace would most abound as men continued in sin. For these reasons the dependence is not trustworthy but vain. Oh! let no one rest on it. He that buried his one talent had not *therefore* ten talents committed to him. We must profitably, religiously employ what we have, if we desire our measure to be increased. Let this be our dependence. If we are troubled with unbelief, let us pray, read, ponder, lead holy lives, avail ourselves of God’s appointed means of conversion, and be content in religion with that testimony which would suffice in other matters: we have no right to demand more, although more is placed at our disposal: conviction shall then soon grow, and the desire of

holiness shall increase with its practice, and faith be confirmed as the practice advances. But if we neglect this heavenly wisdom, eternal happiness is not so light a gift, that He will force it upon us who hath ordained that even temporal good shall not be had without the seeking. If we seek for it as a pearl of precious price, we shall certainly find it. If we wait for it to be forced upon us, we may wait in unprofitableness until the stream of life carries us into the fathomless ocean of eternity, and be suffered to die without share in the covenant of mercy, as we have chosen to live in the contempt of its conditions and obligations.

Whilst this is the nature of the instruction conveyed to the unbelieving in particular, by the rule of our Lord's miracles, his method with respect to Parables, leaving them unexpounded, and so without their full benefit, to those who did not seek to understand them, conveys admonition of the first moment to members of a Christian congregation. If, when Jesus himself preached, multitudes departed without profit, it is not to be always assumed that the unprofitableness of preaching is to be referred to the preacher. If, to the edification of an auditory,

it were needful only that there should be a preacher gifted with wisdom, piety, zeal, and sincerity, who would have returned from our Lord's discourses unenlightened in mind, heart, and life? But, in truth, there is required a great deal more: not only good seed, and a faithful sower, but an honest and good heart. This was that which the Saviour himself required; and this is that which is needed to the effectiveness of human ministration in the sanctuary: an honesty of purpose on the part of the hearers; not simply the formal attendance or tacit acquiescence, but an honest desire to learn and improve; which honesty of purpose is not content with the exclamation, "He speaketh parables," but urges to the inquiry, "what do these parables mean? are these things so?" This is that which is wanted. Wherever it is found and exercised, there good may be extracted from the most indifferent discourse of the most indifferent teacher. Wherever it is not,—wherever the hearer gives or gives not his attention for the time being only, or is satisfied with hearing without laying to heart,—there the most efficient ministration is weak. Often do we hear complaints of preachers,—often are we

told that such an one's ministry is not beneficial; but before we join in the condemnation of one placed in such a responsible office, it will be prudent for ourselves, as well as charitable towards our neighbour, if we pause awhile and reflect whether the fault rests not wholly or chiefly with ourselves. We should remember that when our Saviour preached, multitudes retired without profit. Perhaps the fault has been, in like manner, altogether our own. We have been used to regard sermons as matters of course, as professional effusions, as specimens of composition, as things to be praised or blamed, without ulterior use,—no wonder that they passed away without profit to our souls. We should have treated them as persuasives to holiness, as vehicles of religious knowledge and reproof which it became us ourselves to weigh and improve; as solemn expositions and enforcements of God's word; as a means of grace for the entertainment of which we must one day give strict account.

In concluding, I would briefly urge that our Lord's habit, in respect both of miracles and parables, strongly admonishes us that we must not expect that in the matter of salvation all

things shall be done for us; so that the blessing shall be ours without our endeavours to obtain it. Before our Lord wrought a miracle there was the demand of faith; before He expounded a parable there was the demand of an honest desire to know and improve. We have already noticed that this course of proceeding was in strict unison with the rule of God's ordinary government; "to him that had, was given more abundantly." As the rich man more rapidly multiplies wealth; as the already proficient makes more extensive and quicker advances in learning: so where there was already 'faith,' there was increase or stability given to it; where there was already a docile and inquiring disposition, there was instruction imparted and added. And that this is the ordinary rule in things divine, is elsewhere also taught us, and in plainness of speech. "He that doeth the will of God," saith the Saviour, "shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;" shewing that to Christian *practice* shall be added Christian *knowledge*: again, and to the same effect, when a certain disciple inquired, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us and not unto the world?" our Lord answered

the inquirer that this peculiar manifestation of himself, would be the grace superadded to the disciples' love of Him and obedience to his words. With this doctrine before us, plainly taught by our Lord's practice and words; let us not yield to that strange and foolish conceit which seems to prevail with some, that, whilst temporal goods are not to be had without much and long exertion, eternal salvation is to be supinely waited for as the absolute gift of God without effort or energy on our part. "*Strive* to enter in," saith the Saviour. Let us strive by faith, love, obedience, and the righteous use of the means of religious instruction and edification. Whilst we ponder with reverence, and the deepest gratitude, what great things God hath done for us in sending His Son into the world to take our nature upon Him, and "to be made a curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse of the Law;" let us solemnly consider that as now there is "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, and walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit," so the only impediments to our salvation are our *ignorance*, for the remedy of which none ever were privileged with such easy and plentiful means; our *weak-*

ness, which we may strengthen, if we will avail ourselves of divine help; our *wilfulness*, which it is in our power to bring into captivity to the faith of Christ; our *sins*, which we may break off by righteousness. If we fail of the eternal gift, it shall not be because God hath not willed our salvation, and done all for us which consistently with our freedom and responsibility He could do: neither because His grace is denied to any who heartily seek it, and thankfully entertain it; but, because being careful of many things, we have been careless of ‘the one thing needful,’ and failed in that wisdom which seeks first and above all things “the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” and “gives all diligence to make our calling and election sure.”

SERMON V.

CREATION OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.

GENESIS i. 1.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

THE Mosaic history of the creation is very concise, positive, and dignified. It bears upon it, moreover, that same impress of truth which so peculiarly characterises the sacred writers when they treat of the most mysterious subjects which can engage the mind of man. Moses delivers his account, received by divine Revelation, and with this he is content. He yields not to expressions of doubt; indulges not in private speculations; stops not to admire the events which he is recording; attempts not to explain the wonders with which he is dealing; but delivers himself briefly, firmly, fearlessly, as one conscious that he is speaking the truth; and

therefore careless of the opposition which he might well suppose his narrative would encounter on the one hand from the speculations of science, and, on the other hand, from the wilfulness of unbelief.

“In the beginning,” he says, “God created the heaven and the earth.” Almost every word of this passage is pregnant with religious meaning. Some have considered this verse as a title or brief preface to the matters of the creation, to be presently detailed. Others have understood it as referring to a creation prior to that of the six days; and there seems to be nothing in the words of Moses forbidding the theory that “matter” may have been created antecedently to the received era: so that if geologists are right in their speculations, which is very far from certain, Moses is not wrong; and if they are wrong, he is still right; for whether matter was created six thousand or sixty thousand years ago, his account cannot possibly be wrong, that it was created “in the beginning.”

And next it is to be noted, that the word rendered “created,” imports ‘made out of nothing;’ so that, in the very opening of the Bible, there is contradiction given to the athe-

istical notion of the eternity of matter ; a doctrine which, if it were true, would be so far from lessening the number of “things hard to be understood,” that it would multiply them immensely beyond those of the faith which Scripture imposes ; for, then, instead of the belief of one eternal and independent Cause of all things, it would be required of us to give credence to a self-existing and a self-creating energy in every original animal, plant, and senseless sod.

As to the matter created, “the heaven and the earth,” it is most probable that Moses did not speak so much of the elements of the universe at large as of our own planetary system, the sun, moon, stars, and our own globe: the inspired author of the book apparently restricting himself to an account of man, and the world with which he is concerned. The chief particular, however, in this passage deserving the Christian’s notice is the singular phraseology or construction of words introduced into it. The original is not capable of a literal translation into our language. That which is rendered ‘God created,’ is strictly ‘Elohim created;’ the noun in the plural number, the verb in the

singular. Elohim is the Hebrew term which is thought nearest to correspond and to be identical with the Christian Trinity; so that the Christian has in the very commencement of the Jewish Scriptures an intimation of this grand doctrine of revelation. And this mode of expression, occurring not once only, but most frequently in the Pentateuch, must be thought to have been designedly introduced, as Moses does not invariably employ it, but sometimes uses the singular noun; and considering how beset the Israelites were with the sin of idolatry, and that the plural form might easily have been perverted into an encouragement of the same; we may be confident that he would most studiously have abstained from it, if he could have done so consistently with Divine truth and revelation. But it would not have consisted with revelation, if Moses had said of God the Father only, that He created the heaven and the earth; for in a variety of places in Holy Writ, the creation is ascribed to each distinct person of the Godhead: thus St. Paul declares that God “created all things by Jesus Christ;” and again, he speaketh more absolutely and plainly of the Son, “by whom were all things

created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible ;” and in the Psalms the same almighty work is attributed to the Spirit, “thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created ;” and holy Job saith, “by His Spirit He garnished the heavens.”

After this preface and introduction, Moses proceeds to other matters connected with this subject, including the six days’ creation; and on these I purpose to remark, or on some chief of them, accordingly as there may appear need of explanation or illustration, from the sacred volume, or from the results of human science.

“The earth was without form and void ;” that is, probably, ‘invisible,’ from being covered with the waters, and ‘unfurnished’ from having as yet no vegetation ;—“and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Here, evidently, our globe is represented as having been at first in a state of fluidity; and, whilst a tradition to this effect prevailed amongst the heathen, some of their philosophers maintaining that all things were made out of water; the apostle Peter declares in express terms, that by “the word of God the heavens were of old, and

the earth standing out of the water, and in the water.” And this doctrine is supported by the earth’s figure being precisely that which would be produced by the revolution of a fluid substance round its own axis. This being the condition of the earth, “the Spirit of God ‘moved,’ or ‘brooded,’—as the incubation of a bird upon an egg—upon the face of the waters.” It has been attempted to explain this, so that it should mean only that a strong and violent wind agitated the waters; but such an interpretation seems altogether unfit. The word translated ‘Spirit’ does sometimes indeed mean ‘wind;’ but never, according to the learned, when, as in the present instance, it is coupled with the sacred name; and here it is the Spirit Elohim. Besides, how could there be wind before the creation of the atmosphere on the second day? or how would the notion of a *mighty* wind accord with the gentle cherishing or brooding of a bird? On these grounds we believe that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is intended; and in early times of the church, “the brooding of the Spirit upon the waters” was considered as bearing some analogy to His sacred influences on the consecrated waters of baptism. And, we

may note in passing, it is not impossible that some faint tradition of this Scripture and in this sense suggested the Eastern fable of the mundane egg, which at length burst and discovered the forms of nature.

The next particulars in the sacred writer's account relate to that which is commonly known as the six days' creation; and, in speaking of these, there are but few points on which we shall not content ourselves with almost the words of Scripture. God is not said to have created darkness—that being only the absence of light; but, on the first day, He created 'light;' and, in making this statement, Moses—although not bound to scientific accuracy—has nevertheless approved himself as a philosopher; he represents light to have been created antecedently to the heavenly bodies, and so far independent of them that it existed without them; and this is agreeable to what science has since but tardily confessed,—namely, that the sun is not the source of light, but is rather an opaque body; and that light proceeds from the atmosphere by which that luminary is surrounded. This was the first day's creation; and, at the end of it, there are added the words, "and the evening

and the morning were the first day;" and the like description closes the work or works of every subsequent day. And upon this we shall only remark that, as darkness preceded the light, this mode of expression was natural, and was adopted very generally by the Hebrews, the Greeks, and others, and is not yet exploded amongst ourselves, for we still, in a few instances, compute by nights and not by days, and thus preserve the ancient reckoning. On the second day, "the firmament," or atmosphere, was formed, dividing the waters which could not be evaporated by the heat of the light created, from the waters which could be evaporated, and which floated in clouds and vapours.

On the third day was the gathering together of the waters unto one place, which God called 'seas.' Hitherto "the waters had stood," as the Psalmist expresses it, "above the mountains," but, now, at the rebuke of God, they fled. And again, "He layeth up the depths in storehouses; He sendeth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills;" alluding, it is thought, to those secret treasures of water which flow from the bowels of the earth. And so holy Job, "He shut up the sea with doors,

and set bars and doors, and said, hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." And, agreeably to this representation, as the seas were now put under and the earth above, men are said to go *down* to the sea,—“they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.” The waters subsiding, the dry land appeared, which God called ‘earth;’ “and the earth brought forth grass and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit whose seed was in itself after his kind;” whence it appears that as God created man, so created He all things else in a state of maturity; and from this it has been inferred that the ‘season’ of the creation was that of autumn, from which, accordingly, the Jews commenced their civil year.

The fourth day witnessed the creation of the ‘Sun and Moon,’ the greater and the lesser lights; or, more properly, light-bearers; and of the Stars; and these were ordained for ‘signs, significant of things extraordinary as well as ordinary; and so our Saviour speaketh, “there shall be signs in the Sun, in the Moon, and in the Stars,” alluding to the harbingers of the

great day : they were ordained for ‘seasons,’ according to the four great divisions ; for ‘days,’ defined by the motion of the earth round its own axis ; for years, determined by its annual rotation round the sun ; and the ‘stars’ were created, one differing from another in glory, and so multitudinous that no man can count them ; although in the words of the Psalmist, “ God telleth the number of the stars ; He calleth them all by their names.” The fifth day’s work consisted in the production of animal life ; commencing with the smallest creatures, and ending with whales or great sea monsters, such as the Leviathan spoken of by Job ; and including reptiles, with which the waters abound, and fishes and fowl made out of the waters. In other places, ‘fowl’ are said to have been made out of the ground, and the two descriptions are reconciled by adverting to the different properties of the feathered tribes and winged insects. And now first God blessed his creatures with the blessing of fruitfulness and multiplication ; which is generally considered equivalent to the bestowal of the power whereby to continue their species. The sixth day called into being, ‘Man’ and beasts and cattle, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Having taken this passing glance at the six days' creation; it may be well to notice that some have considered, that the word 'day' in this account is not to be restricted to the space of twenty-four hours, but rather understood as expressive of an indefinite period of time; perhaps a thousand years; seeing that the Psalmist has said, "a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." To this suspicion, arising from appearances in the state and nature of the masses of the earth, and of their organical remains; which, in the present state of our geological knowledge, seem to have required a longer period for their occurrence than the short space of six natural days would have admitted; to this notion or opinion, we answer first, that undoubtedly in the fourth commandment, the days of 'Creation' and working days of twenty-four hours are identified; and secondly, a living writer of much and deserved celebrity replies, "that if there were absolute necessity to adopt this view, or to approve the statement, it would be most reasonable to coincide with the idea, which indeed is found among the traditions of some ancient nations." But he adds, "that after

the most patient comparison and consideration of their facts and reasonings, he cannot but fear that geologists have not at all advanced beyond plausible conjectures, and these mostly are at variance with each other. As fast as one theory is set up, it is found to be wrong by some succeeding inquirer, who attempts, in his turn, to establish a different one of the same tendency in its stead. These circumstances prove that the right theory has not yet been discovered; that erroneous deductions have been made from the phenomena which have been seen; and that these are not yet justly understood, nor their real bearings discerned." Hence he continues unmoved in his belief, "that whatever is true in fact, and correct in inference on the subject, will be in the end found to be consistent with the common meaning of the expressions used by Moses. His, Moses's brief intimations, are doubtless the first outlines of all true geology, and the more our materials of judgment have increased, the less founded any opposing speculations appear to become." And, this writer subjoins, "I have lived to observe that nothing of this character, however plausible at the moment of its appearance, has had any duration in

human estimation, not even among the sceptical themselves. There is certainly no appearance that any theory contradictory to the veracity of Moses, will long survive its public enunciation."

And now having taken a brief review of the wonderful works of the Creator—the difficulty is, on which of the attributes of God displayed in the creation to fix for the purpose of promoting devotional feeling. Shall we dwell on the *power* of the Creator calling the universe out of nothing, launching forth planetary systems, without number perhaps, and some at such infinity of distance from us, that light travelling with its marvellous velocity, has not yet reached from them to us? Power spoke the word, and "the earth, without form and void," developed a world of exquisite beauty and order, and never failing interest. Power commanded the mountains 'to stand up,' and the waters to recede, and the earth to disclose its rich and varied stores, and 'it was done.' Power filled all space with existence, with creatures so wonderfully made, that no skill of man has yet contrived how a fibre or a joint might be more advantageously disposed for use and beauty—some of these creatures so

vast and mighty that they would be the terror and destruction of the creation, if it were not for another wondrous creature in whom mind triumphs over physical force; and others so minute that thousands inhabit a single drop of water. But when we speak of the power of the Almighty, human language can only exclaim, and human breasts can only feel, that it is wonderful; and wonder is oftentimes a barren sentiment. Shall we, then, admire the *wisdom* of the Creator? His “works are manifold, and in wisdom hath He made them all.” Power created the planetary orbs, wisdom marked out their appointed courses in which they should infallibly travel and fulfil their Maker’s will. Power created living animals, wisdom provided that they should not perish so soon as made; supplying them with reason or instinct, which should be their defence and support. Power made, and wisdom *so* made that the wisest have never discerned how they could have been better formed. Yet the wisdom of the Creator—evidenced in these and a multitude of other respects—is not thoroughly intelligible to us: it is in some points foolishness to us: we see not the wisdom of making some things as they

are, and in others we see not the wisdom of making them at all. And the like may be said of the *benevolence* of the Creator. “We know in part,” and can judge in part only. Goodness forbore from the exercise of power to hurt or hinder our happiness; it apportioned to every creature its suitable element, and constituted that element a sphere of enjoyment; it appointed that endless variety of beauties, of colour, of form, which is everywhere presented to the eye; a variety perfectly gratuitous, over and above our necessary wants, and no more needful to us than a picturesque scenery is essential to the place of one’s abode. But here too, in the matter of the Divine goodness we are at fault; we see it clearly in many particulars, but not thoroughly and to perfection in all. In the natural world, there are seeming spots and blemishes which we know not how to reconcile with the divine benevolence; in the moral world the existence of evil—though doubtless perfectly consistent with infinite goodness, yet—so perplexes us that the mind after its best endeavours desires greater satisfaction. All these attributes—eminently displayed in the creation—are admirably adapted for religious meditation; and

if the thoughts are held in subjection to the revealed Word, and the subjects are pondered not with a view to gratify our curiosity, but to enlarge our minds, and create, and feed a reverential feeling, they shall not fail of religious fruits. But then, as they all are more or less mysterious—and the danger is great if we handle them as if they were void of mystery—if we would treat them discreetly and understand them to the utmost of human ability, there is one want for the supply of which we should earnestly beseech the throne of grace. The first creation of God was ‘light,’ and He made it that we might see His works and spread His praise; but sin hath so blinded our eyes, perverted our vision, weakened our judgment, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Whenever, therefore, we give ourselves to such holy and sublime themes, it should be our prayer to Him who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that He will cause it to shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God; and that, as he divided the natural light from the darkness, so He will provide that the

light which is in us be not darkness. Then may we hope to contemplate God, His works and attributes, if not to perfection, yet in safety to our faith, and more and more to the satisfaction of our minds. The light which cometh down from above, and is ministered by the Holy Spirit of God, shall direct us, that we err not as the "blind groping in the dark," and presume not beyond our strength; and it shall unfold to us many mysteries of God's Providence and grace which pass the understanding, and endanger the faith of those who seek not help and illumination from on high. And whilst the light from heaven guides, it shall also warm and kindle in us a love of God and holiness, and excite us to gratitude and worship; and, as we grow in duty and holiness, there shall certainly, and at least, be one attribute of God more fully revealed to us. His power and wisdom may still remain in all their mystery; but his goodness shall be more fully developed. We shall acknowledge it, as others do, in the works of creation and providence; but we shall see it above others in the great and gracious provision for our souls. As we increase in holiness, our desires shall mount above this lower world; our

views transcend its limits; our affections shall not rest on things of sense; time shall not satisfy us; the earth shall not be pure enough in our eyes; we shall use it, indeed, as made for our necessities of food and raiment; we shall walk in it reverently as the work of the great Creator, and replenished with objects exciting to thankfulness; and tread on it cautiously, lest we wantonly hurt or destroy what infinite wisdom, power, and benevolence, have called into being: but it will not content us: we shall pant for a home which shall be our place of abiding; for a scene more congenial to our hearts' delight, and more satisfying to the reasonable soul; and the goodness of God shall be transcendently felt by us, above all our natural gifts and joys, in that He hath provided for us a better country—even an heavenly; and that, through the merits and mediation of the Saviour, a way has been opened unto us in which, if we walk, we shall not fail of any of the good things which He hath promised.

SERMON VI.

CREATION OF MAN.

GENESIS i. part of verse 26.

*And God said, let us make man in our image,
after our likeness.*

THE simplest method, perhaps, whereby to attain to the knowledge of our real rank in the scale of beings, is by the consideration of the circumstances of our original creation. For this reason alone the creation of our first parent is a matter of lively and universal interest, and I have selected it for present meditation. And, in speaking of this event, we may commence with the observation, that however humbling may be, and is, the light in which the Scriptures regard man subsequently to the Fall; the account which they give of his creation is as flattering as human pride or vanity could desire. “The heavens and the earth” being finished;

the one being garnished with the sun, moon, and stars; and the other being filled with vegetable and animal life; the sacred historian gives us to understand that a sort of pause occurred in the work of creation, and that the Triune Godhead consented and combined in the matter of *our* production. And this intimation is conveyed to us in the marked change of terms and style observable in the sacred record. In the creation of light and the firmament, and in the gathering together of the waters, the language represented as that employed by the Great Creator was simply "let there be:" and so also when the waters and the earth were commanded to abound in animal and vegetable productions, the only representation is that the fiat or volition issued from the Creator, and operating upon the matter formed sufficed to the ends. But now when 'man' is to be called into existence, the style is suddenly and singularly altered, and the language is more formal, and also deliberative; indicating that the creature to be produced, required the union and concurrence of the blessed persons of the Godhead. God said, "Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness." Attempts

indeed have been made to deprive this language of its obvious and religious implication; but all have miserably failed. It has been suggested, for instance, that Moses introduced the Creator as speaking after the manner of 'kings;' and this before 'man' was made, and his mode of speech could be adopted! and when, in fact, the plural form is not the one employed by the royal persons whose names occur in the sacred volume: thus Pharaoh says, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go," and Darius, "I make a decree." Others again, to evade the doctrine of the Trinity, have contended that this language imports only that the Creator conferred with his angels in the work of our creation; but, in the first place, if angels were meant we should be without the means of knowing it; no inspired writer having instructed us to this effect, and no mention of angels having yet occurred in the Scriptures; and, secondly, it is expressly said, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness;" and surely no one pretends that man was made by angels, or in the image and likeness of angels, especially in the face of that which is written after the creation "in the image of God

created He him." But, thirdly, in holy Job we read, "His angels He charged with folly;" and is it reverent to suppose that He the only wise and "in whose sight the heavens are not clean," should take such creatures for his counsellors and coadjutors? in the language of the Apostle, "unto which of *them* said He at any time, 'Sit on my right hand.' " But supposing that the objector could, by any even plausible pretence, escape from the exhibition of the doctrine of the Trinity, in the passage directly under our notice; his labour is by no means ended, and his respite from subterfuge and disingenuousness would be very short; for, in the next chapter but one, he meets with another expression which requires more skill than he can command before the unbiassed lover of truth shall be persuaded that it does not involve the same doctrine. The Lord God said, "behold the man is become as *one* of *us*."

But we must not consume our time with the objections of unbelievers, when we have matters before us requiring the Christian's best thought and attention. The obvious meaning of our text is that, in the creation of man, there was somewhat to distinguish it exceedingly beyond

the creation of other animals, and that the persons of the blessed Trinity emphatically concurred in the work. No pretence in opposition to this view has been at all supported by the unbeliever; and it itself is in perfect accordance with the many places in Holy Writ, which attribute our creation to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We proceed then to note that the divine counsel being established, "The Lord God," Jehovah Elohim, an expression again involving the self-existent and eternal Trinity, "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," or more strictly speaking, the breath of lives, "and man became a living soul." In this passage we are furnished—according to the judgment of some of the most learned—with an account of the creation of each part of the compound man. His body was formed of the dust or mould of the earth; and, in testimony of its origin, unto dust it doth return; and, in this respect, man cannot claim a nobler stock or destination than other animals; although the favour of the Creator towards him is eminently displayed in the structure of the human frame,—its erectness

of posture, the beauty of complexion, and agreeable varieties of feature; shewing that if we are made of the same lump with other terrestrial creatures, yet even in bodily respects we are distinguished above them as “vessels unto greater honour.” And whereas it is said “that the Lord God breathed into man the breath of *lives*,” and this is not said of any other creature; the plural form would seem to convey more meaning than that a single or animal life was imparted to him; and the most judicious have not scrupled to infer from the expression that, beyond the gift of the animal life, the breath of the Lord God inspired into man a more excellent spirit; namely, the soul or spirit whereby he not only breathes and moves, but thinks, reasons, and discourses.

Apart, however, from all nice conjecture or criticism, the sense of the account altogether (if not the precise meaning of the terms) may best be learned from a comparison of the creature formed with the design or intentions of the Creator. Doubtless the one corresponded with the other. Now the counsel of the Lord God was, “let us make man in our image, after our likeness:” questionless, therefore, man was made

in that image, after that likeness; and this is indeed declared in so many words, “so God created man in His own image,—in the image of God created He him.” But it cannot be that the image and likeness of God are reflected in our bodily form, or in our animal passions; for we are certainly taught that God is a Spirit, ‘without body, parts, or passions;’ and the prophet Isaiah inquires, ‘what likeness will ye compare unto Him?’ evidently signifying that He is not capable of representation by any sensible or corporal form. It must be, then, in other and higher properties that this resemblance exists, such as those of a moral and intellectual nature; and in these the likeness is easily discernible. We cannot conceive of God other than that He can reason, will, choose, and refuse, and compare means with the end, and the end with the beginning; and with all these faculties, though in an infinitely inferior degree, the soul of man is endowed: above all, we cannot conceive of God other than that He is eternal, and the soul is immortal; other than that He is “righteous in all His ways, and holy in all his works;” and in righteousness and true holiness the soul of man, as it becomes freed from the alloy of sin

and imperfection, most faithfully represents the image of God, and most nearly, though always at an infinite distance, approaches to the perfection of the 'Father of Spirits.'

From this account of the creation of man, it cannot be denied that he was one whom the Creator delighted to honour, and that he designed the creation for high and noble purposes. This is signified by the pause which is represented as having occurred in the divine counsels previously to his formation; by the imparting of the breath of lives; and above all, by man alone being made in the image and after the likeness of his Creator; and to this we might add, that the dignity of the creation was still further attested by the glorious preparations which were made for his use, comfort, and delight. The heavens were spread out as a canopy, with the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and replenished with objects which should never fail in interest, and in the provocation of love and praise. The earth was made a paradise, and stocked with creatures useful for his service and prepared for his dominion, and with all things needful for his support and enjoyment; and, then, man came forth as the

priest of the temple built by God himself,—the prince of the palace—the lord of the mighty domain—the great vicegerent in the image and after the likeness of the universal Creator, to administer the affairs of this lower world as “one who should give account.”

And now it may be inquired, wherefore has time been devoted to the consideration of what man *originally* was, when it is universally admitted that he is sadly fallen from his first estate; and that he but ill corresponds with that character, which was first impressed upon him. We answer, that it is desirable to disabuse men of unworthy notions of their rank in creation; and, secondly, that the scriptural account of our creation recommends that religion which has unity of design with the Creator’s original purpose in our formation, undertaking to restore us more and more to that image which we bore, when fresh from the Creator’s hands.

It is exceedingly important that men should be reminded of their dignity in the scale of beings. So long as unworthy notions on this subject possess them, it is hardly to be wondered at if they debase themselves accordingly. If they think themselves scarcely distinguished

from other animals, it is little matter of surprise if they devote themselves like them, to that which is grovelling and sensual. The great divisions of mankind are unhappily those who give themselves to the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, and honours; and rarely do some even think of the image and likeness in which they were created. They follow their hearts' lust, as if it were good in itself and for itself; and, moreover, as if the gratification of it were the fulfilment of their nature. They consult only the baser part of it: the noble and characteristic part is left uncultivated and unproductive. But if they are right, the Creator was unmeaning when He made man 'erect,' which even the heathen understood as significant that he should contemplate and aim at higher objects than those of earthly and passing interest; He was spendthrift too in the gift of desires and affections, which neither the world, nor the things of the world can satisfy; and in planting in the human heart emotions of praise and worship, which rise without bidding, and soar above the things that are seen. But the Creator was neither unmeaning nor spendthrift. The truth of the case is that these are in error; and, whilst

they imagine that they are acting up to their nature, are obedient only to the lowest principles of it; neglecting their peculiar calling and the noblest properties with which they are gifted. Whatever of gain and gratification they may compass; they are not supporting the image and likeness after which they were created. Man lives not according to this, nor according to his nature, unless he conducts himself as a reasonable being; reducing his appetites into subjection to that which his Maker engrafted in him as the controller of his views and pursuits, and for the subjugation of the animal to the spiritual man: he acts not according to his nature, unless he exercises the nobler endowments of his mind on the noblest objects; unless he practises himself in the Godlike attributes of truth, justice, and benevolence; and unless, above all things, above all sensual desires and earthly pursuits, he approve himself as a religious being.

Instead, however, of dwelling upon a point of such obvious truth, let us rather notice that the religion of the Gospel recommends itself to us in undertaking to exalt us to the high dignity from which we have fallen. The image of God after

which we were created is sadly debased in us, we will not say with some altogether effaced. Man in his powers and affections is very far gone from his original state. The will is perverse—the understanding is weak—the desires are earthly—and it is sometimes difficult to trace any of the lineaments of the image of God. But the religion of Jesus Christ saith to us in our fallen estate, in the name and (in effect) in the language of the Triune Deity, “let us make man again in our image after our likeness.” It is the doctrine of Revelation, that as the Holy Trinity made us, the Holy Trinity hath redeemed us or recovered us from our lost estate; and, in token of this, as we were at first formed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so in the first entrance or admission into the New or Christian life, we are baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And as the work of our recovery is ascribed to the Triune Godhead, so has each person of the Godhead his distinct office in the great consummation. The Father of his abounding love sent the Son; the Son of his free accord became the propitiation for the sins of the world, and “whatever benefits are

given us in Christ, all these we understand, feel, and receive by the work of the Holy Ghost." Christianity is in a word the system by which our corrupt nature is renewed to its primeval dignity. The soul which was ruined by the fall has been redeemed and recovered by the blood of Christ; the image of God in the mind and affections, is renewed by the cleansing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; and as the *body* of man also suffered by the fall, and became subject to death; so is it the design of the Gospel to deliver it from death and from the power of death, by making it like unto Christ's glorious body. Christianity is a system of godliness and holiness; and godliness is God's likeness, and holiness is only conformity to the holy nature of God, "the image and likeness," after which we were formed; and the whole aim and use of Christianity are briefly expressed in this, that "we put off the corrupt nature derived to us from Adam in his sinful state, and be renewed in the spirit of our minds; and put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." This is the aim of the true religion; and it is not wanting

in ways and means by which to accomplish it. All the means of grace are means of holiness, and means whereby we are restored to the image after which we were created; and he that devoutly employs them, knows and has the witness in the sanctification of his heart and mind that they are not vain; and he that employs them not, shews, if he does not feel, that the image of God is but faintly preserved in him, if it be not utterly erased.

Man, we see, was highly distinguished of the Creator in his original creation; he was designed for noble and religious purposes; and whatever has been by sin and the frailty of nature impaired, is remedied by the Gospel provisions of grace and mercy. Let us, then, henceforward endeavour to live in the consciousness of our native dignity, and in the diligent cultivation of our eminent privileges, and those excellent properties by which our corrupt natures may be restored to their primitive integrity. We were not made for grovelling pursuits; neither for the gratification of base and animal passions. Of this we are assured, not only by the account of our creation, but also by the fact that the condition in which the Creator placed us was not

adapted for men of mean and sensual characters. The Eden which the Creator appointed for man's abode and scene of action, was doubtless fitted for the just enjoyment of the creature; such enjoyment as, in the judgment of the Creator, befitted and ought to constitute the happiness of the inhabitant. Accordingly, there was provided in it a rich table of profound meditation for the man of science; constant supplies of new and varied pursuits for the active and benevolent; ample opportunities for the exercise of the bodily frame; abundant materials for the cultivation of taste and talents; and, above all, never-failing themes of praise and adoration for the growth and increase of religion: but the depraved intellect and appetite had found no paradise in Eden; they must have waited for their gratification until the garden which the Lord God had planted had become dishonoured and polluted by the intrusion of sinful lusts and affections, and sordid and selfish interests.

Let us be warned by the destitution which such characters would have experienced in the midst of the earthly paradise, to attune ourselves in spirit for that inheritance of which the terrestrial Eden was a faithful, but yet imperfect type.

We are clearly taught that into the *heavenly* Paradise also there shall in nowise enter anything that defileth, or that worketh abomination; if, therefore, we are in earnest when we profess that we are seeking to dwell with the saints in light, we shall certainly cultivate a love of that *holiness* “without which no man shall see the Lord”—by which we approach nearest to the image after which we were created; and apart from which the happiness of heaven would be no fruition. Holiness and happiness were the first union which the great Creator cemented; and no man hath been able to put them asunder, or to attain to real and substantial happiness by other means. Men, indeed, have devised Edens for themselves, and from which holiness was banished, and according to their wilfulness; but the gold of their land has not been good but cankered; and the fruit of their trees, if pleasant to the sight, has not answered to the demands of their nature. Some have sought for happiness in the accumulation of wealth; but in the midst of their greatest abundance there has been ‘no blessing of the Lord,’ and He has withholden a contented spirit. Others have sought it exclusively in science; and yet

the narrow proficiency which the Creator has allowed to the mightiest intellect might have warned them that this was not the path marked out by the Author of their being for the satisfying of the reasonable soul. Others have sought it in an ambitious pursuit of this world's honours; and have found, too late perhaps, that possession is but poor enjoyment. Others, in the gay and giddy whirl of frivolity and fashion; but when the excitement has ceased, they have discovered to their shame and grief that happiness was the last and least ingredient in their composition. And others have sought it in base indulgences; and, when they had reduced their nature to a level with that of the brutes, have been content, perhaps, with a brute's felicity. Oh! it is unworthy of us—that is, of our nature—to give ourselves to pleasures which our consciences condemn; to enslave ourselves to vanities which our reason tells us we cannot hold in the grasp; to desecrate the temple of the soul by the cultivation of passions and feelings which are the reproach even of the brutes over which the Creator has assigned us dominion. But it is worthy for us to tread on the earth, as made for our use; to carry ourselves erect to heaven, as

that after which we should aspire: it is worthy of us to exalt reason to her native throne, as holding dominion over the sensual man, and to reinstate conscience in that dignity in which the Creator placed her; it is worthy of us to feed on angels' food, and to do the work of God.

May we walk worthily of our holy vocation as men and Christians. Flesh and spirit, heaven and earth, are united in us. It is not suitable to our nature that the flesh should lord it over the spirit; and that which is earthly enslave the heavenly. Let us not suffer it. Soon must our bodies be returned to the earth from whence they came, and our spirits to the God who gave them. He impressed on them His image, He will look for His likeness. If we walk according to the rule of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we shall not be found wanting; but, through His merits and mediation, be pronounced veritable sons of God, and heirs of eternal life. We shall "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and, that our search be not in vain, we shall seek in faith, and with prayer for light and help to direct and sustain us. We shall duly avail ourselves of all sacred ordinances, by which the soul is

purified, renewed, and strengthened. We shall exercise our minds on the things of God. We shall train our affections so that they shall desire nothing in comparison with God and heaven. We shall practise ourselves in those works of love and usefulness in which the angels delight. Praise and worship shall be the habit of our hearts and lives. And, thus living the life of God in our souls, that image after which we were formed shall be revived and preserved; and when we awake from the sleep of death, it shall be “after His likeness, and we shall be satisfied.”

SERMON VII.

SOME CAUSES OF UNBELIEF.

Acts xxviii. 24.

*And some believed the things which were spoken,
and some believed not.*

THIS may be received as a description of the state of the world from the earliest times; and it will, probably, serve throughout the period of the world's duration. Before the flood, there were unbelievers—the children of Cain; and believers—the children of Seth—inheriting the faith of Abel. After the flood, there were the believing Hebrews, and the unbelieving heathen; and still there are the same distinctions, “those who believe,” and “those who believe not.”

This state of things is undeniable; and, in certain instances, is readily accounted for, but not in all. Some are not blessed with the light of the Gospel; others do not heed it, give it

thought, or examination; and, as the cause of their unbelief can be no mystery, we shall put their case at once out of our present consideration. But other unbelievers do examine and use human helps for the formation of a right judgment; they are qualified, too, in respect of talent or ability; and have all facilities of means and opportunities for the prosecution of their labours. How shall we account for *their* unbelief? The reason is certainly not self-evident. But let us consider the matter; and what explanation may and may not be rendered for the satisfaction of the inquirer.

Shall we say then, first, that the unbelief of such is to be ascribed to their superiority in learning over those that believe? This account is so notoriously contradicted by fact, that it would be a waste of time and pains to give it anything more than a plain denial. It is true that such a conceit is very common and prevalent amongst the unbelieving themselves; but it is equally true that the names enrolled on the side of Christianity would cast into the shade the most forced and lengthened list of its adversaries; if a comparison were instituted as to their claims and worth in the world of science and letters.

But, if not superior in learning, shall it be said that such unbelief arises from the circumstance, that unbelievers more thoroughly and narrowly investigate the matter of revelation than others do? This pretence, too, cannot be maintained; for, both in former and present times, there have been and are to be found in the ranks of believers, many, very many, whose chief, if not sole, business it was and is to search and prove the Sacred volume. And to this they have applied themselves throughout long lives, and dedicated their time and talents and worldly means; and for this they have been content to sacrifice their ease and worldly prospects. It would be difficult for unbelievers to produce those of their own body, who in the same cause have manifested an equal desire of truth, and expended the same pains and perseverance, and exhibited the same disinterestedness, in the pursuit of it.

But it is sometimes alleged, that believers are more *credulous* than unbelievers; and that this is the secret of their believing, and others not believing. In what, however, does our credulity consist? It will be answered, “in believing the Bible, and that which it contains.” But why

do we believe the Scriptures? Is it not because they are a document supported by all evidence, and confuted by none? A document freely submitted to the world, and which the world is challenged to refute; and to the confutation of which thousands have applied themselves, with all zeal and anxiety, and yet have notoriously failed. Should we not in any other case be accounted, and justly, foolish, or mad, if we yielded not to the weight of such testimony as that by which they are supported? Where, then, is there ground for the imputation of credulity? We are born into the world in ignorance of the way of salvation; we find in the world a volume purporting to be a revelation from God for this express end: we examine it with all fidelity; balance all that can be said for and against it; challenge the freest inquiry; and the evidences of its genuineness and authenticity being far more satisfactory than those which uphold any document of equal antiquity, we acknowledge it to be that which it pretends to be, and dutifully receive it as such.

This is the sum of *our* credulity: but who can measure the extent of theirs who lay this to our charge? *They* believe that the Bible, which

has all external and internal evidences in its favour, and nothing to refute them, is not what it pretends to be ; that the founders of our holy faith were deceivers without any imaginable motive ; that, being deceivers—and they must have been wilful ones if at all—they took all pains to propagate a religion which consigns to endless wrath, “ him that maketh a lie ;” that, to spread this religion, they voluntarily endured every hardship without earthly gain ; suffering loss of worldly reputation, fortune, and life. They believe that the Apostles were enthusiasts, in the face of their writings which prove them to have been men of sound reasoning, and cool judgment and determination ; or that they were impostors, when every earthly incentive to fraud lay on the opposite side or cause to that which they advocated ; or that they were crafty and cunning, and yet chose for their leader one who was condemned as a blasphemer, and executed as seditious. They believe that a few illiterate Jews, all at once, and most unaccountably, enlightened the world in matters of morals and religion ; and prevailed in the dissemination of them infinitely beyond all the efforts, for many ages, of the most learned of the Jewish

Doctors and Gentile Philosophers ; that, all of a sudden, and from no sufficient cause, they laid aside their national and most inveterate prejudices, and pursued a course directly opposed to all considerations of earthly benefit ; and, that being humble in station and few in number, they alone, and without divine guidance and support, succeeded in establishing a religion which favoured the prejudices of none, and was hostile to the nature, views, and inclinations of all. This is a sketch of the unbelievers' belief, and we may judge from it, with what face or grace they impute credulity to us.

If these reasons will not hold for the unbelief of those with whom we are concerned, shall we account for it on the ground, sometimes set forth by unbelievers,—notwithstanding their boast of *liberal* sentiment,—namely, that believers are not so honest as themselves ; that they disguise their real opinions, and, making public profession of the faith to serve certain temporal ends, are, nevertheless, as sceptical as those whom they condemn ? We say in answer, that it would be difficult to produce evidences of sincerity greater or better than those which have in all ages attested the genuineness of the believers'

faith. In the first rise of the Gospel, believers were ready to renounce fortune, family, and kindred, and to go to prison and to death, rather than cast away their hope; and the same has been the case in subsequent generations, whenever persecution has forced upon them the cruel alternative. And, universally, the true believer, by reason of his belief, follows a rule of heart and life, not conformed to the maxims of worldly prudence; always at variance with the natural will; always demanding sacrifices of ease and substance; and sometimes requiring most painful estrangements of affection and friendships. By reason of his belief, he takes to himself virtues and graces, which, however lovely and necessary to the enjoyment of a purer state, are of little worth in worldly estimation, and in no way tend, but rather are hinderances, to temporal distinction or aggrandisement. He forms and maintains habits of prayer and religious exercise of which the world has no knowledge, and which, if it knew them, it would reward only with a smile or a jest; he devotes to charity what he might, with others, consume on self and sinful pleasures; he raises his views and affections to that

place on which his faith commands him to set them; he directs his best energies to that object which his faith enjoins him to seek first and above all things; in prosperity, his faith is constituted the controller of his pleasures, the dispenser of his means; in adversity,—when men do not lean on that which they know to be a broken reed,—he clings to his faith as the sure anchor of salvation. In a word, the true believer heartily endeavours ‘to be’ and ‘to do’ according to the tenor of his faith; and, if this is not evidence of his sincerity, on what shall we fix as better and stronger? Shall truth of *affection* be allowed to be proved by a comparative contempt of all other than the object beloved, and by earnest endeavours to conform oneself in all respects to His will and pleasure; and yet the sincerity of that man’s *religion* called in question, who seeks, above all things, the favour of his God and Saviour, and makes it the business of his life to fit himself, at all costs, for an inheritance with the saints in light? The charge of insincerity or dishonesty might be retorted an hundredfold upon those who impute it to the conscientious believer. It is more than questionable, for example, whether, out of the

number of those who have laid claim to the hateful distinction, there ever has been one honest or conscientious atheist. It is far more likely—since they profess to believe nothing which cannot be proved, and they cannot prove that there is no God—that they have put forth to the world as their conviction, that which was only the desire of their hearts. And, as to others, what shall we say of their honesty, when they shamelessly distort facts, conceal truths, misquote and pervert testimony, and are for ever urging convicted falsehoods as new and irrefragable positions? Is it possible that they themselves can believe *that*, the belief of which is built on so much fraud and violence offered to conscience?

Hitherto we have stated only what are *not* the reasons of the unbelief of such persons as we have noticed; namely, those who examine the Bible and its evidences, and are not wanting in abilities or opportunities for arriving at the truth; and we have denied that the reason is either that they are more learned, investigating, or conscientious, than believers; or that the distinction lies in this, that believers are more credulous than the unbelieving.

Let us now proceed to account for such unbelief, not by reasons of human conjecture, but after the authority of God's word.

The scriptural account of the matter is very clear and concise. The Word of God never attributes the absence of faith to any arbitrary decree of God, hindering any from belief; nor to any lack of evidence; nor yet to any defect of natural ability, wherewith to weigh and judge rightly of the evidence before us: not to any of these causes does the Scripture ascribe it, but rather to these two; that there is, on the part of the unbelieving, some great *moral* impediment which they may remove by righteousness; and that, in particular, they have not sought and cultivated faith.

The general character of unbelievers—given them in the Scripture—is that they are corrupt, sensual, and that their heart is waxed gross: “if our Gospel be hid,” saith St. Paul, “it is hid to them that are lost,” that is, as appears from the Greek and the context, *to them that are perishing in sin*. And our Lord himself demanded of the Jews, “How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?”

Our Lord himself intimating, in their case, that ambition, vain-glorying, and worldly-mindedness were the great hinderance of their faith in Him : and *hence* we may argue that, universally, evil lusts, desires, passions, and affections, are mighty obstacles in the way of Christian belief. And this view, whilst it reflects the highest honour on our faith, representing that its *fullest* apprehension is inconsistent with any prevailing lust or wickedness ; and that the purer we become, the more thoroughly congenial to us is the Gospel ; so does it instruct us—agreeably to the Scriptures just quoted, and their uniform tenor—that, wherever there is unbelief, we may refer it to some *moral* obliquity. And where, in the annals of unbelief, can we find one unbeliever—not free from sin, for no man is, but—free from some predominating and unrestrained vicious quality, which may well be fixed upon as the great hinderance to the reception of divine truth ? Very many unbelievers have been convicted of the most open profligacy ; others, of secret ; some have been less guilty than others ; but where in the ranks of unbelief shall we find one who—if exempt from the charge of flagrant iniquity—is free from

imputations of moral defects which are most hostile to the reception of truth of any sort, and especially divine truth? Next to *habits* of sinful indulgence, which weaken as well as bias the judgment, and destroy the conscience—there are, perhaps, no greater enemies to Christian belief than pride and vanity. These affect to see more clearly than others; will not bend to evidence; nor take what is plain, without subtilizing; nor what is mysterious, without explanation. And these are ingredients very commonly, if not uniformly, found in the infidel character, and manifested not simply in the matter of religion, but in their ordinary bearing with their neighbour; in their contempt of authority and impatience of control. And we may believe the prevalence of such feelings to be a chief reason that humility is so constantly and earnestly insisted upon as the first step in the kingdom of God: “Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The gate of knowledge is low, and the pride of reasoning, and vanity of conceit, must bend and stoop at the first admission: the gate of faith is also low, and demands that we cast down all vain imagina-

nations, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; if we would learn of Him the wisdom that is wise unto salvation. Many, indeed, may say and think that it is not at all pride or vanity which hinders their belief; and may represent, as they often do, that the cause is rather 'the mysteries of religion,' and things hard to be understood: but as the *mysteries* of religion are the same to all, the believing as well as the unbelieving, the learned as well as the ignorant; and as they themselves believe other mysteries just as great—there must be somewhat beyond *their* mere existence, which causes them to be stumbling-blocks in the way of the one, when they are not to the other: and the true account seems to be that, if their pride and self-conceit were subdued, these mysteries would be no more a barrier to their belief than to that of others. They would then take like others, the *facts* of Scripture, and the *facts* of Scriptural doctrines; and being once assured of these, and that they are found in a book, whose claims as the Word of God are established beyond controversy, they would acquiesce; without holding their belief in suspense, until they have satisfied themselves on questions, the solu-

tion of which does not concern them, and is not required of them, and could not affect that which is certainly, and on the authority of God's Word, truth. But the pride of reasoning is not content with knowing on sufficient authority that things are so, but will perplex itself with the difficulties, *why* are they so, and how *can* they be so? and the vanity of display would often rather reject the truth, than lose a chance of triumph in the discussion of it.

But another cause of that unbelief, into which we are inquiring, is, that they who have not faith have not rightly sought it, and cultivated its growth. They may have anxiously studied the Bible, and the varied and powerful testimony by which it is supported; but it has altogether escaped them—although it is plainly taught us—that proficiency in faith is to be attained, like eminence in other *practical* things, by practice being associated with our learning, and keeping close company and pace with it. The Master himself hath said, “He that *doeth* the will shall *know* of the doctrine whether it be of God;” and they who would learn in His school should, of course, conform themselves to His method; but the unbelieving wofully fail in this matter,

and their unbelief remains. They do not practise themselves in godliness, while they are professedly learning godliness; and their labours end as unsatisfactorily as theirs would, who should hope to be poets or painters, by merely studying the works of the best masters, without duly exercising themselves in the respective arts. It is in vain for any to allege that there is no affinity between the acquisition of faith, and eminence in these other respects; he is answered at once, that the Master himself hath said that there is; “do, and ye shall know.”

We have stated two grand faults with which unbelievers—such as we have been speaking of—are chargeable; and it remains only that, to the remedy of their unbelief, they should be exhorted to apply what they have heard. Let them examine impartially into their condition; if they do not find cause to condemn themselves of sinful *habits* of transgression, they will learn that some one evil lust, or passion, holds the mastery over them, unfavourable, if not fatal, to the free exercise of judgment; or forbidding the adoption of that course, which their best discretion would enjoin. Perhaps, they do not believe, because belief would be a hinderance

to their unlawful gains, pleasures, or pursuits: or, perhaps, they are passionately fond of men's praise; and the modest way of faith does not promise them so much notoriety and baneful admiration of their talents, as the way of infidelity—or, perhaps, an overweening conceit of their superiority possesses them, not suffering them to be satisfied with those evidences which have been eminently satisfactory to men of the most scrupulous consciences, and of exceedingly higher powers than themselves. If they find no ground of self-accusation in these points—which by the way is hardly possible—let them most earnestly apply themselves to that rule by which, on the Saviour's authority, faith is promoted. As it is said in Scripture, “that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above;” and, again, “ask, and it shall be given you:” let them not rest in these as theoretical maxims, but take them in practice as the most effectual method of dealing with their doubts; and ask of God, upon their knees, and in fervent prayer, the most excellent of gifts, that of a believing heart. If a ray of holy truth illumine their consciences, let them not allow it to pass by as a flash of lightning, and to die away as a falling

meteor; but let them court its radiance, and longer stay, by the immediate sacrifice of all hostile prejudices; in a word, as they study the sacred volume, they will find inscribed on every page, ‘holiness to the Lord:’ let them *practise* holiness, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; and practise as they study, not deferring it until all religious doubts are quieted; but flying to it as one of the best antidotes against all doubt.

If they follow this advice, we can promise them that a love of religion shall grow as they pursue this holy course; and this love, first indisposing them to unbelief, and destroying its great attractions, shall soon cause them to hate it with the most perfect hatred. If they do not follow this advice, but cling to their sins, or permit any one sinful lust or propensity to hold them in slavery,—or forbear from practising whilst they are learning: their unbelief may, and most probably shall, remain, and do the work of ruin to their immortal souls. But—let them be solemnly warned that their unbelief cannot make void the Word of God, nor avert the wrath of God against those who do such things. “If we believe not,” saith St. Paul, “yet He abideth faithful:” He cannot deny

himself, so as not to execute condemnation, as well as fulfil his promises. When Moses, by command of the Lord, prophesied to Pharaoh, that there should be the plague of hail, which should come down and destroy every man and beast which should be found in the field; some of the servants of Pharaoh believed, and some believed not; they that believed, made the servants and cattle flee into the houses—they that believed not, left them in the field: the hail came, and the unbelieving perished. So shall it be in the end of the world. Unbelief is now solemnly warned of its danger. If the sentence be not immediately fulfilled, the answer is, “the time is not yet.” The language of the merciful householder is, “let both grow together” at present, the believing and the unbelieving: that the one may have extended opportunities of more fully approving themselves, and the other may learn righteousness by reason of the favour shown them. But when ‘the time’ is come, the season of harvest, he will say to the reapers, “Gather ye together, first, the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.” And, whilst we urge this upon the unbelieving, we would impress it too

upon the many, who not ranging themselves with the unbelieving, but professing to be convinced, are not yet converted, but only half Christians—Christians in name and profession, but not in deed and truth—the time is fast approaching, when the chaff shall be separated from the wheat, and they who have depended on the plea and cry, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall receive ‘according to their deeds.’

And, besides addressing ourselves to these, we would subjoin a word of encouragement to the believing and conscientious disciples. Let them not be disturbed in their minds by the circumstance of many disbelieving what *they* confidently hold, and in which they put their trust. We see in our daily experience how variously truth is treated by different persons, and how greatly its reception depends on the habits and prejudices and desires of men. It is so now; it was so in the days of our Lord. The same facts, His wonderful works, were submitted to men freely; yet the effects, and judgment pronounced on them, were widely different: some believed, others believed not; and some who believed, believed not *as* others believed, but bearing the same unequivocal testimony to the

facts, drew from them the most opposite conclusions; allowing the miracles, but blaspheming the power by which they were wrought; “He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the chief of the devils.” And, when Paul was expounding to many on the occasion to which our text belongs—though the things taught were the *same*, and all had the same testimonies from Scripture submitted to them; and all, we may suppose—as they were chief of the Jews—were nearly equally qualified to judge of them; yet “some believed and some believed not.” The unbelief of men ought not, then, to shake our confidence nor appear as somewhat strange; but, rather, the general character of unbelievers should warn us to beware of that unbelief which is frequently associated with the extremest wickedness and always with sin; and the many moral and social evils connected with infidelity, can hardly be understood otherwise than as beacons erected by the Moral Governor of the Universe to deter his creatures from walking in the ways of Cain; and to admonish them to follow in that path which is pleasantness now, and has promise of the life to come.

SERMON VIII.

DAVID'S SIN.

2 SAMUEL xii. 13.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

DAVID'S history is marked by the strangest reverses; but these were not more differing and opposite than the uses which have been made of it. The righteous refer to it in evidence of the corruption and weakness of human nature; of the shocking enormities to which good men may be led, if they relax in the diligent custody of their souls; they take occasion from it to rejoice in the plenitude of divine mercy which embraces the worst of sinners, if only they will turn from the evil of their ways; and, whilst they learn from David's sins and punishment

to abhor sin, they delight to meditate on his demeanour under that affliction which his sins occasioned; his depth of sorrow and contrition—his zeal for the honour of God—his warmth of devotion, and other excellences by which he was distinguished in an eminent degree. The use which the wickedly-disposed make of this history is widely opposite. They see in it matter of infidelity, and they derive from it encouragement or excuse for iniquity. First—they turn it to infidel purposes; they argue that it is incredible that so wicked a man as David was, at a certain period of his life, could be a chosen servant of God, raised up, inspired, directed, and assisted by Him, as the Scripture sets forth; and hence a conclusion is drawn unfavourable to the truth of the written Word. The same objection, though it may be in a less degree, lies against other Scriptural characters; for none of them were perfect. And, in answer to it, we say in the words of a learned writer, that so far from its being incredible, “it is perfectly credible that men should have been raised up for particular purposes, aided in effecting a particular object, inspired with a certain degree of knowledge, assisted at particular periods,

and in a special manner; and yet that beyond this, their natural character, their external temptations, their acquired habits, may have produced all the irregularities and crimes which gave so much offence. To ask why God did not prevent this, is to ask why He did not exercise a greater degree of supernatural control than the peculiar purposes of Providence required; a question as absurd as it is presumptuous." This answer would seem satisfactory; it being a rule of obvious propriety that God, having special purposes in view, should not interfere beyond what was needed to their accomplishment; particularly when such interference must have led to the destruction of the freedom of a creature whom God himself had created with power to will and act, and made responsible for the exercise of his power. But the wicked pervert David's history so as to quiet their consciences whilst indulging in most sinful excesses. They argue that if sins like his were pardoned, *they* need not be under an alarm of the divine wrath; for, like him, they will by and by repent and shall be forgiven. But in this sort of argument two most important considerations are overlooked.

If David had perished in his unrepenting state, there can be no question, on the authority of God's Word, that he would have been dealt with as a wicked man dying in his wickedness, for "with God there is no respect of persons;" they, therefore, who confide in a future repentance, ought first to be well assured that they shall be spared, and spared also to repentance; both of which matters are enveloped in the darkest obscurity: they may be cut off in the midst of their iniquity, and *suddenly* lost for ever; or, if they are spared, yet it may not be to repentance, but rather, for the accumulation of wrath; their sins by long and hardened indulgence taking such hold of them, such full and firm possession of their wills and affections, that repentance shall never be their hearty desire and purpose.

Observations of this nature seem to be always required when we touch on David's iniquities. And, now, I would add a few desultory reflections, not for the purpose of condemning those sins of which few are guilty, and which meet with the common execration of the virtuous; but in the hope that we may be able to derive from the narrative in our chapter some instruction of more general applicability.

Assuming that we are acquainted with the story of David's conduct to Uriah; his adultery, his base endeavour to use the injured husband for the purpose of concealing his guilt; and, lastly, his treachery and cruelty in compassing Uriah's death; our first observation is to the effect, that David's previous history would never have led to the suspicion that he could have perpetrated such horrid crimes. Who was this murderer of his friend and faithful officer? The same who, on several occasions, had expressed the utmost abhorrence of the crime; and executed signal vengeance on those who had destroyed his bitterest enemies. When, for example, Joab slew Abner—who had set up a king in opposition to David, and for some years supported a rival faction—David cursed Joab with a terrible curse, and said, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord for ever, from the blood of Abner;" and he wept at his grave, and uttered a lament over him, and he fasted, and he said, "the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness." And, again, when Ishbosheth—the son and successor of Saul, and whom Abner had set up against him—was slain by his captains,

and his head was brought to David, and they said to him, "Behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life;" David answered, "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me saying, Behold *Saul* is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings; how much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed, shall I not now therefore require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?" and he commanded that they should be slain and hanged. These sentiments and proceedings could never have occasioned a suspicion that David could patiently have borne with the murder of a friend; much less that he himself could purposely have contrived it; yet we see him—in the instance of Uriah—deliberately plotting his dishonour and murder; and, when the news of his death was brought him, wickedly dissembling the part which he had taken, and attributing the event to the chance of battle; he said to Joab, "Let not this thing displease thee; for the sword

devoureth one as well as another;" and this too he said to the very man whom he had commanded to put Uriah in "the forefront of the hottest battle, and leave him, that he might be smitten and die." What a different conscience was here exhibited, compared with that of the man whose heart smote him because he had only cut off the skirt of Saul's robe in the cave of Engeddi. The contrast presented is so great that we could hardly believe such opposite conduct to have proceeded from one and the same person. But David, unhappily, is not a solitary instance of the direful and thorough change of character which can be wrought by one ungoverned lust; his eye wandered and let in impure desire; he entertained it, and the barriers of moral and social virtue fell before it. And others have, in like manner, afforded as painful a contrast to all that rank and education had led to expect of them. And surely we are powerfully warned by our knowledge of this, that we should watch most vigilantly against the indulgence of any one sinful lust. If we cherish it, and there are obstacles in the way of its gratification, it is not once only that the lust has overleaped all

opposition, and rushed headlong to the most frightful enormities, and exhibited a man, otherwise amiable, in the worst light in which human nature is known.

A second reflection is suggested by the indignation and wrath which David exhibited when he heard Nathan's parable. He was an adulterer and murderer; and the prophet delivered to him the parable of a rich man, who on the occasion of a traveller visiting him—although he had exceeding many flocks and herds of his own—spared to take of his own flock; but took the only and favourite ewe lamb of a poor man, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him. David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, because he had no pity, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." Here was a case of oppression and robbery submitted to the judgment of a murderer and adulterer; and the sentence pronounced by him was one of the heaviest punishment. We might certainly have expected that David would have hesitated in taking upon himself—greater culprit as he was—the office of judge; or, we might have looked for a lenient sentence, knowing, as he must have

known, that any severity would recoil with immense increase of force upon himself: but there was no scruple, no mercy; David had not *stolen* a poor man's sheep: robbery, such as *this*, was not the sin of his liking; and he would deal with it after the utmost rigour. And this is only a counterpart of what we may witness any day of our lives. Every man has his own sin; is severe against his neighbour's, and judges of its guilt, not with a righteous judgment, but rather according to his own disrelish of it, or interest in subduing the practice of it. Many an one living in the habitual and wilful transgression of some of God's commandments, fixes on the violation of *one*, to which he is not tempted, and the breach of which would be most injurious to himself in his particular calling, condition, or circumstances; and sets it down as the most deadly offence, without consideration of its real or comparative guilt in the sight of *God*. The honest trader thinks fraud to be the offence most deserving of the severity of the law; the gamester thinks there is scarcely a crime to be named with that of not discharging what are called 'debts of honour;' the spendthrift sets down the miser as the worst of characters; and the

openly profligate knows not sufficient language in which to condemn the hypocrite. Now—without balancing the guilt of these respective parties—we may derive some instruction from a consideration of this practice of mankind. In the first place, seeing that men are most partial in their judgment of transgression, we should not depend on their verdict; but seek an authority, independent of the bias of human infirmity and interest; and this authority is the Word of God, which deals faithfully and without respect of persons with all sorts of iniquity. Secondly, as every man is severe against his neighbour's sin or fault, it is the easiest inference that all sin is hateful, even in the eyes of man. What then must it be in His judgment, who looketh not only on the outward act, but weigheth the motive, and traces the sin in its consequences, direct and indirect, near and remote? And, thirdly, if men are commonly severe against those sins only which are not sins of their own choice; when we find ourselves arguing in extenuation of any sin, the prudent course will be to inquire, wherefore are we so tender in our dealing with it? The truth will often be, that we ourselves have affection for it; and whilst we

may be flattering ourselves that we are exercising a kind and Christian forbearance towards a neighbour; we may be in reality, only palliating our iniquity, promoting the indulgence of it, and smoothing the way of final and wrathful retribution.

A third reflection arising from the narrative is, that although David, on his repentance, was forgiven, yet none of the temporal punishments of his sin were remitted. His child died; the sword departed not from his house; the remainder of his days was as disastrous as the beginning had been prosperous; rape, incest, murder, rebellion, raged amongst his children; he was deserted by his friends, reviled by his enemies, driven from his capital. Now if any man sin, taking the forgiveness of David as the covenant in which he trusts; he ought, undoubtedly, to have some regard to these conditions. If he sin and look for pardon after the precedent of David, there is no reason wherefore he should not reckon also on David's punishments or others like unto them. In his instance, they were of the most grievous description; and in the case of others, the temporal inconveniences of transgression are so consider-

able, and sometimes so certain, that if sin did not utterly blind men to self-interest, they would be deterred from following it, merely by worldly motives. In the Epistle to the Romans the apostle Paul demands of those who once were the servants of sin, "what fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed; for the end of those things is death." Loss of character, fortune, health, and self-esteem; degradation of rank, alienation of friends, destruction of peace of mind; these are usual penalties of iniquity; and men would avoid it for their sake, if that stubbornness which leads them headlong in the contempt of God's favour, did not also harden them against regard for their present welfare.

Again, it would appear from the narrative, that some months elapsed after David had committed this shocking iniquity; and, yet, his conscience never convicted him. If wickedness of the kind had been David's habit, this circumstance might be more readily accounted for: but we should not have expected such insensibility to these heinous offences in the case of a novice. The dulness, however, of his conscience may perhaps be attributed to one or

both of *these* causes: first, he was immersed in the business of his kingdom; and, secondly, we know it to be the way with the wicked that, feigning excuses for their guilt—in order to extenuate it in the sight of others—they sometimes come at length to believe in their own deceitful pretences. And thus it may have been with David. He endeavoured to persuade Joab that Uriah had fallen by the chance of battle; and, by frequent use of this fallacy, it may have been that he came at length to credit his own miserable subterfuge. The like causes are now working the destruction of numbers. Some are so much entangled with the cares of life, or are whirled about in such constant rounds of frivolity, that a serious thought of their *real* guilt in the sight of God never gains admission; or obtains more than a momentary possession. Others have so plied themselves with vain pretences, that they have come at length to “believe a lie,” and are passing to the eternal world in the imagination of peace, when no peace belongs to them.—Now, in such circumstances, it is evident that the most essential service which a man can render his neighbour is by enlightening him on the subject of his real condition,

and urging him to a godly repentance. And as this is not the most grateful office to perform, nor yet the one most thankfully received—for however loud men may be in their expressions of a desire that some one would tell them their faults and sins; yet, a faithful discharge of the duty has been found so generally unpleasant, and visited with such returns, that few even of friends the nearest and dearest will venture upon it—it has pleased God to make sundry provisions by which thought may be awakened, and the conscience aroused; and this leads to another, and the last remark on the narrative.

David's conscience being dull and torpid, and friends perhaps not daring, and enemies having no care, to rebuke and warn him; the Lord sent the prophet Nathan unto him, to set before him the things which he had done, and, along with the prophet, He sent affliction to confirm and enforce the prophet's words; and these together wrought so effectually that David repented him bitterly of this crying iniquity. And that his repentance was sincere may be learned, first, from the Psalms which he composed on the occasion—particularly the fifty-first—in which there is the deepest con-

fession of his sin and guilt, and every evidence which language could afford that he offered unto God that precious sacrifice which God will never despise, “a broken and a contrite heart.” But the sincerity of his repentance is, perhaps, the best attested by *this*, that Nathan, by the word of the Lord, assured him that “the Lord had put away his sin,” only his temporal judgments should remain; and they did remain in full force, and in despite of the most fervent intercession on his part that they might be removed. And this—as it was ordered for his punishment—we may use for our own instruction. The repentance of faith will certainly restore us to the favour of God through the atonement and mediation of Christ; and our consciences, after many evil deeds, may regain their confidence of final acceptance: but the example of David teaches us that the same repentance may not, and indeed in many cases, *cannot* remedy the *temporal* evils which we have wrought by transgression. The mischiefs which we have done to ourselves and to others abide long after the soul has recovered its forfeited peace; and, knowing this, on the one hand, we ought not to despond of salvation because the

present evils of our former conduct may still exist and harass us ; and on the other hand, the knowledge that, after the fullest repentance, these evils may still severely afflict us and others to the end of our and their days, should counsel us with effect to keep innocence from the first.

Such are the remarks which I had to offer on this portion of David's history. We have had under our contemplation the case of a holy man—for, notwithstanding his atrocious sins, which we do not attempt to palliate, that the infidel may have no hold upon us, and that we may not seem for the sake of supporting revelation to deviate from the principles of revelation—notwithstanding his flagrant delinquencies, David was yet one of the greatest of God's servants ; an excellent king, a divine Prophet, endued with a wonderful measure of the spirit of God ; a man of a broken and contrite heart, and an illustrious type of our Redeemer. We have, then before us, the case of a holy man led by temptation to the most revolting excesses : we have seen how blind he was to his guilt until he was warned by a prophet from the Lord ; and that, *then*, he deeply repented and

was forgiven; but yet the sentence of temporal retribution was not remitted. If I were to warn my hearers against the precise sins which he committed, many would consider and treat the admonition as superfluous, and out of place; feeling in themselves a virtuous abhorrence of them and deeming it impossible that they can ever become polluted as he was. Let me, however, counsel them that they trust not to their virtuous indignation or their sense of security, but hedge themselves around with constant vigilance, and beseeching of God's grace. Our temptations are not the same with David's—and this, by the way, may be the only reason wherefore some of us are not criminal as he was; but our *nature* is the same, and it requires no prophet to assure us that it is prone to evil, and that if we give it the reins, it will carry us whither we would not go. Our wisdom, therefore, consists—not in glorying that we are not as other men are but—in providing for our steadfastness and perseverance. And that we may do this effectually, we should frequently examine our hearts, that we may learn to what we are most inclined, and with what danger we are most closely beset. And as

the deceitfulness of these may make us partial judges of ourselves; or the cares and pleasures of the world may hinder us from doing this work as it ought to be done; or as our consciences may have grown dull through long abuse—a matter not enough considered, seeing that every one appeals to his conscience, and often without a thought as to the pains which he has taken to promote its integrity and faithfulness—as these, one or all, may deceive us, let us thankfully use those monitors which God has ordained for helping and enlightening us in matters of everlasting concern. Nathan was sent to David after transgression, and affliction went with him: the office of ministers of religion is not only like Nathan, to reprove where wickedness has been committed, but to tell their fellow-creatures beforehand to what they are liable, that they may escape present as well as future retribution. Let us listen to their admonitions—not with a view to the condemnation of other men, but—with an earnest endeavour to improve ourselves. When they speak of *great* sins, let us remember also that they speak of little beginnings; for, from such beginnings all wickedness flows: and let us turn our thoughts

to the most scrupulous watchfulness of these, that we may crush iniquity in its birth. And, besides these endeavours—let us diligently search the Word of God, where we shall discover much to be condemned and subject to the wrath of God, which the world and ourselves perhaps have hitherto regarded as of little moment in the matter of salvation: let us look at Providential doings, not with a stupid wonder, but as the voice of God warning us of the consequences of sin, of the instability of human joys and concerns, of the importance of setting our houses in order; and let God see that his servants hear. Let us daily implore the renewing and strengthening influences of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to bring things to our remembrance, and to prosper our holy purposes and endeavours. If we give ourselves to this wise and religious course, much shall be brought before us, calling for the deepest repentance; but this shall enable us the better to cleanse ourselves from evil, and to train ourselves more fully in heart and mind for the kingdom of God: and our recompense shall be great, if, at the close of life, when we ask of our Bibles and ourselves, How stands our

account with the Judge of all the earth? the Spirit of God shall bear witness with our spirits, that we are of the number of those to whom, through the satisfaction and intercession of Christ, "the Lord will not impute sin."

SERMON IX.

HONOUR TO PARENTS.

Exodus xx. 12.

Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

It is not the manner of God's written Revelation to set itself to the systematic exhibition of those religious *doctrines*, the knowledge of which may be attained by other means. Hence the 'Being of a God,' 'the spirituality of the divine essence,' 'the immortality of the soul,' the existence and authority of conscience; these and other doctrines—of the first moment, and to the proof and illustration of which many volumes have been devoted—are all passed by in the Sacred volume without systematic proof, and taken for granted as doctrines, to which the

right use of enlightened reason would infallibly conduct us; and, therefore, as not falling so properly within the province of a revelation whose object was to deal with matters not, indeed, contrary to reason, but above the reach of its powers. In like manner, in the matter of *morals*, the Scriptures are altogether silent on several virtues and duties on which human writers insist at great length, and some of which they extol at an extravagant rate. Some of these, such as valour, are passed by because they are of doubtful good, or dependent on circumstances over which we have no control. Others, such as friendship, are not commanded because by their very nature they admit not of any enforcement or compulsion. Others, such as patriotism, are not enjoined because, under general and undefined terms, they might be used as sanctioning the greatest enormities. Others, such as doing good to those who do good to us, are omitted; because they are the earliest dictates of an ingenuous disposition. And others, such as that 'parents should love their children,' are not enjoined; because the propension of nature that way is so strong and universal, that if injunction be required, it is

rather for the moderation and regulation of this bias.

This being the way with the written Revelation, it may seem somewhat extraordinary and an exception to the usual course that such a precept as the one in our text should ever have found a place in the Sacred volume. That children should honour their parents, to whom they are most deeply indebted; and to whom, at the best, they can render but very poor returns, will appear to the generality as natural a duty as that parents should love their children. Why, then, is there a written command imposing the one duty, when there is none enforcing the other? Why is it written, "Honour thy father and thy mother," when it is nowhere written "Parents love your children." The answer seems to be that, in the case of parents, nature herself is in general a sufficient teacher so as to ensure that the parents' love shall be exercised in the direction of the offsprings' welfare. But in the other case—that of children honouring their parents—although the duty is also taught by nature; yet injurious causes, conflicting passions and interests, so soon come into operation against it, that nature

alone would be a very imperfect surety for the performance of it. Hence probably it is that Scripture deviates from its ordinary rule and insists on the importance of this *natural* duty; it being unsafe that it should be left without the sanction and obligations of revealed religion. And hence also it is incumbent on the ministers of religion, that they deal with those causes which are likely to weaken the force of this precept of nature and revelation. First, the Scriptures insist on the *importance* of this duty. The very place which this precept occupies in the list of God's commandments is an indication of its high moment. The commandments have been arranged differently by different churches and in different versions; but, as a learned divine remarks, "in every distribution and division, among the persons of all persuasions, and in all languages, the precept now before us, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' is always ranked immediately after those which set forth our duty to Almighty God. The order in this instance is so natural and undeniable, that neither design nor accident has ever disturbed it. After that entire and boundless obedience and veneration due from

all to God, the next degree of respect and reverence is that due from children to their parents." The locality of the precept, then, bespeaks its importance; but its peculiar obligation is established in other ways also. God himself condescends to take the title of Father; and certainly no ordinary "respect must be due to that character which the Supreme Being has chosen to be the representative of His own." And it is to be noted, further, that this precept is distinguished in other respects from the rest of the commandments, and by particulars which appear to invest it with more than ordinary force. In the other commandments it is left for us to infer what we are to do, from that which is forbidden to be done; as, "thou shalt have *none* other gods but me;" "thou shalt *not* make any graven image;" "thou shalt *not* take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;" thou shalt do *no* work:" but in *this* instance alone the command is express and positive; and the divine Lawgiver hath added energy to the precept by a manner of speaking more cogent and positive; honour thy father and thy mother. Neglect in this instance is against the very letter of the law; and he who does not exert

himself in the keeping of the commandment, breaks it. Again, this commandment is, as St. Paul declares, the first commandment with *promise*; “that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.” The long and happy possession of Canaan was the reward proposed to the Jews for the keeping *all* God’s commandments, and this reward being annexed in particular to the commandment before us, alone out of the whole ten, cannot be understood but as signifying that it is a *principal* commandment, of peculiar moment, and singular efficacy in bringing down that blessing which was due to the observance of all. And, although this promise was of a peculiarly Jewish character, yet we cannot believe it obsolete, or no longer abounding to the Christian; seeing that St. Paul, under the Gospel, quotes the promise along with the commandment, as if both were still in force; and we know from observation that ‘children honouring their parents,’ are generally more prosperous than others; and if the prosperity is not always conspicuous in this life, yet as the virtue is the most acceptable in the sight of God, we must believe that there is a special reward for it laid up in heaven.

But, further, in illustration of the importance of this duty, it is specially recorded of our Saviour that he was subject unto his reputed parents; and He himself has instructed us that the duty is of such high obligation that, like unto that of forgiveness, our offerings of devotion and charity are not grateful to God if this duty be neglected. It was held by the traditions of the elders that if a son—instead of relieving a parent in need—made a formal dedication to the service of the temple, of those means by which he could have assisted his parent; if he said that that, by which his parents might have been benefited, was a gift to God or the temple, he should be free, that is, exonerated from the obligation to succour his parent: but our Lord condemned this doctrine as rendering of none effect the commandments of God; and, by so doing, evidently taught that “neither acts of charity nor of devotion can be well-timed when they obstruct men in their duty to their parents; that God will accept of nothing till this necessary duty is paid at home; and that when men divert, even to sacred uses, what is required for the relief and comfort of a parent in want, the holy treasury is defiled by the offensive offering.”

Still more the importance of the duty is urged by the severity of the punishment with which the neglect of it was visited under the Mosaic Law; and by the description of offences with which it is classed by the Evangelical writers. By Moses's law the punishment of wicked and obstinate children was the same with that which was apportioned to the greatest criminals, blasphemers, and idolaters. "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son which will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them; all the men of his city shall stone him with stones that he die;" the same dreadful sentence which was executed on idolaters and blasphemers. And the punishment being the same, the son of Sirach represents the offences as nearly akin; "He that forsaketh his father is a blasphemer." St. Paul, too, seems to acknowledge the affinity between them by arranging the criminals together, "blasphemers, disobedient to parents." The sentence of the Mosaic Law has—we may remark, by the way—been stigmatized as inhuman and brutal; but the accusation is made in haste, or in malice, or in both. In the first place,

the culprit must have been a most profligate and abandoned character, 'stubborn' and 'rebellious:' secondly, he must have been previously corrected by his parents, to the satisfying of the elders or judges that there was no hope of his reformation: thirdly, the parents themselves must be the prosecutors, and both of them *agree* in visiting on him capital punishment; which, considering the strength of natural affection, could hardly ever be the case with both father and mother: and, lastly, the elders and not the parents were to be the judges; so that the process was to be a deliberate one, and not in passion; and if the parents, in this slow and solemn proceeding, relented not in the prosecution, but could both of them hold out against the powerful pleadings of their own flesh and blood, we can believe it to have been in the case of the most reprobate only. The severity of the sentence was doubtless devised, as in other enactments, for the prevention of crime; and it so far succeeded that there is no instance on record of its having been carried into execution; and the prosecution was so impeded by the operation of natural feelings, and the trial so under the control of impartial judges,

that conviction could scarcely have taken place except in the instance of the most incorrigible.

Enough has been said as to the importance of the duty; and its importance was, we may believe, one reason wherefore this precept was not left with some others to the teaching of nature. Another reason is to be found, perhaps, in the extraordinary jeopardy in which the observance of this duty is placed by the fault of both parents and children. And as we have spoken at some length respecting the duty; the practical portion of this discourse shall be occupied with considerations of the causes, or some principal of them, which combine to render the commandment altogether, or greatly, of none effect.

First—undoubtedly parents themselves are frequently the cause. The duty of honouring parents is taught by nature; and, because of the powerful passions and interests which are leagued against it, and which render it unsafe that it should be left without the peculiar sanction of Revelation; it is enforced also in the written Word of God. But this being the case, a great and just complaint against many parents is, that, in the education of their offspring, whilst they are careful of many things, they cast into

the shade that reverence for religion which, if it were deeply impressed on youthful minds, would eminently promote the parents' honouring, as well as their general peace and happiness. Their children may, perhaps, be taught and accustomed to read the Bible; but sufficient pains are not taken to instil into their minds, that what they read or learn out of the Bible, is the Word of the Almighty God; and binds them under the most solemn obligations: and that disobedience subjects them to the most fearful displeasure. They read—but due care is not employed in making application, according to the capacity, of the everlasting responsibility which is attached to the doing of what they hear or read; and thus religion takes not its proper place, the *first* hold, on youthful fears and affections; and many dishonouring their parents, have only an indistinct knowledge or sort of speculative belief—if they at all think about it—that in so doing they are committing an offence that is really of the first magnitude in the sight of their Creator and Redeemer. The greater fear—"how can I do this wickedness and sin against *God*," is not maintained in lively operation; and the lesser fear—that of incurring

human displeasure is inadequate, and overcome by a variety of temptations, palliatives, and pretences. It seems but natural that parents, who would that their children should honour them, should first impress them with reverence to Him, from whom their own title to honour is derived. An ambassador puts forth his sovereign's authority as his claim to respect. Let parents diligently, and as a real thing, inculcate the 'fear of God,' and they may look for reverence, where their own name, character, and claims might not procure it.

Next to the neglect of making religion a real matter in the minds of youth; it is charged upon many parents, that they do what they can to render this commandment ineffective, by filling their children with silly conceits of their precociousness, their beauty, their consequence in the world, and their prospects in life. Such conceits are eagerly imbibed by youth; and fostering a spirit of pride and independence, tend in any other direction than that of promoting humility and subordination. If children are made or treated as men and women before they are youth, it is hardly to be expected that they shall not feel the importance assigned to them;

or that, feeling it, they shall of themselves adopt those graces, which their parents have in effect habituated them to lay aside. Again—the foolish *partiality* of parents is a great reason wherefore this commandment works not so fully and beneficially as it would. A child's eye is quick, and his sense of justice keen, and he is not slow in discovering and feeling any unevenness of treatment or affection; and it is rather too much to require that he should abound in the honouring of those who are capable of groundless, disagreeable, and invidious distinctions. It is a kind of proverb, that the worst son is the favourite; and the currency of the saying is attributable perhaps to *this*, that where there is a bad son, he excites in the parent's bosom the strongest emotions of pity and fear; which give rise to demonstrations of affection, which would not be manifested towards others, except they were in like peril of ruin: but, whatever be the accuracy of the saying, it is certain that favouritism has a tendency to make the best child the worst; and instances are not rare, but rather it is in the usual course of things, that such partiality is visited on the parents by the most heartless returns.

As favouritism is a fault with some; so is *severity* with others: there is an habitual harshness, perhaps, as if purposely designed to forbid the child's imagining that the parent is united to him by any tie of affection; or else, perhaps, there is every now and then a sudden outpouring of wrath, not proportioned to the offence, but rather according to the parent's humour; and correction inflicted in the heat of passion, for the purpose, it may be, of correcting passion in the child. If a child honour his parents, it certainly will not be for these things, or on these grounds. In the one case, if there is 'honour' rendered, it will be of a servile description, without mixture of that love, which the parent has studiously endeavoured to eradicate; in the other, the retort will always be ready in the mind, if not with the lips—"Physician, heal thyself," "thou that sayest that I should not swear, dost thou swear? thou that sayest that I should not be intemperate, art thou hasty and furious?" Solomon indeed saith, "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son;" but he that loveth his son, will not only love him, but endeavour that his child may be sensible of his love in all his proceedings; and he will shew it by his unwill-

ingness to any severity; by his reasoning with him in the hope of preventing the necessity; by trying all means before he has recourse to the painful extremity; and, if all fail, by administering rebuke or punishment, at the last, in the character of a loving and offended judge, not in that of a brother criminal. There are many other ways by which parents are to be charged with the violation of this commandment: when they are treacherous to their children's interests; false to their trusts; immoral in their habits or talk. We cannot command children to honour them on these grounds, for this would be a command that they should honour the vices of which they are guilty; nevertheless it is implied in our commandment, that they hide their parents' failings, and there was a curse on him who gloried in his father's shame.

We have reason to say that the parents are oftentimes the cause wherefore this commandment fails of having obedience rendered to it; but it is not meant that the fault rests wholly with them. In the first place, there is a natural waywardness by which some children 'go astray' in this particular—almost so soon as they are born: no sooner do they become sensible of the

eye which has watched over them with painful vigilance, and the hand that has waited on them in servile attendance; than they repay into their bosoms the bitterness of ingratitude and rebellion; and all efforts to reclaim them are vain. With others the commandment is rendered of none effect through want of *reflection*. They look upon a parent's care as a matter of course; thinking that they shall always share in it, and have abundant opportunities of making amends for the present or past; but forgetting that Providence often interposes to teach them better wisdom, by taking to himself the affectionate guardians of our early days, and leaving youth to contend with those difficulties and dangers which the parent would have encountered single-handed, and of which he would have borne the weight and grief; or they look on parental discipline as if it aimed only at curtailing their pleasures and thwarting their propensities; not considering that such crosses and vexations are in reality hinderances placed in the way of their ruin, and by the most disinterested affection. Many other things might be stated as accounting for the dishonouring of parents, and which are the children's faults;

but I shall only notice one particular more, and the notice of it seems required by the circumstances of the times. In these days of general and enlightened education, there is oftentimes a conceit engendered in the breasts of youth by a real or fancied proficiency in knowledge; by which they think that they have obtained a superiority over those whose lot was cast in less favoured times, and when education was neither so general nor so generally carried out to its present extent; and it is the way with weak minds to catch at one advantage, and thence to infer a general super-eminence; and where this weakness prevails, there naturally results a minishing of respect towards those who are reckoned inferior. But surely youth should consider, that whatever advantages of this sort they possess, they are indebted to their parents for them; and increase of honour is due to their parents for that sacrifice of pride and feeling, which they make in granting their children advantages which were denied to themselves, and which, in certain respects, raise their offspring above them. Apart from this consideration, however, youth must be sadly weak and ignorant if they imagine that the knowledge of

languages or proficiency in science is the only or the most valuable; or that it gives them such an ascendancy that they may despise all other. There is the knowledge of *life*, without which other attainments fail of their use; and this knowledge is best and most safely to be obtained in the experience and counsels of a parent. But, besides this knowledge, there is another in comparison with which merely human attainments are absolutely to be despised. Human knowledge, at the best and utmost, is but as the gleanings of a harvest, the full abundance of which is locked up in the storehouse of the only wise God; but *this*, saith our Saviour, is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. And if youth have not this knowledge, they know nothing yet as they ought to know, for it should be the foundation, guide, and end of all our pursuits; and if they have this knowledge, they will never consider themselves wiser than their elders, whilst they are wanting in the observance of God's commandments, and especially such in important one as that which is before us; "Honour thy father and thy mother."

I have now offered considerations setting forth

that this commandment is eminently and peculiarly sanctioned in the Word of God. I have also touched on some of those which appear to be the chief reasons wherefore the commandment is not respected as it ought to be, nor so effective as it might be. “The Lord hath given the father honour over the children; and confirmed the authority of the mother over her sons.” It is God’s commandment; and the obligation to keep it does not vary according to the waywardness of youth, or the parent’s neglect or caprice. He that gave the commandment will require it at our hands with the usury of dutiful practice; and we cannot think that excuses, founded on wilfulness or sin of any description, shall be valid in His judgment. It is complained of youth of the present generation that they are not so respectful to their parents as youth once were; if the complaint is just, we have no hesitation in adding that they are not so high in favour with God as they once were and as they need to be. Let those look well to it whom it most concerns. Parents are in the advance to another world, another scene, even the judgment-seat of Christ. Let them labour, as good Christians, to train their children in the

nurture and admonition of the Lord, that they may present them to their Redeemer with joy and not with grief, as those who have been kept in His name, and none of them lost through their fault and guilt. If they slight this wisdom through mistaken kindness, through needless austerity, through wilful defect of counsel or example; in their passage through life they may have occasion for bitterness of lamentation, which shall be a veritable witness of a broken heart; in their deaths they may look around and in vain for those objects which should be the solace of their dying eyes : and after death they may feel that want which the religious will endeavour to limit to this world, “ Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and Benjamin is taken away.” And while we thus admonish parents; to youth we would say, that the duty of honouring parents involves a dutiful regard to their instruction; obedience to their commands, so far as they are lawful; a thankfulness for their benefits; a reverence for their persons; that they bear with their infirmities—they cannot try your patience more than you exercised theirs—that they support and comfort them in weakness and want. As respects these last particulars, let youth

treasure up the beautiful language of the son of Sirach, "My son, help thy father in his age and grieve him not as long as he liveth; and if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy full strength; for the relieving of thy father shall not be forgotten; in the day of thine affliction it shall be remembered; thy sins also shall melt away as the ice in the fair warm weather." This is the duty of youth; if they observe it there is a promise of reward, besides that which is given in our text; "he that honoureth his father shall have joy of his own children." If they neglect it, not only is heavy penalty recorded against them, but the voice of every creature cries out against such unnatural conduct; "the eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out; and the young eagles shall eat it." And how shall a child that has lived in wilful rebellion against his earthly parent—how shall he be fit for His presence who is most endearingly known to us in the same character? If he love not the father whom he hath seen, how shall he love the Father whom he hath not seen? If he is not moved to humility, obedience, reverence,

by benefits *sensibly* dispensed, by the hand which he feels, the lips which he sees moving, and the pains which he witnesses—how shall he be touched with a just sense of those numberless mercies which walk in secret, are ministered by an invisible agency, and which the same ungrateful spirit would refer to any other than their proper Author and Giver? Oh! youth often die young;—let them beware lest they be cut off whilst dishonouring their parents, and be summoned to give account of their obedience to a command which they have only learned to despise. “Fathers, provoke not your children, lest they be discouraged.” “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”

SERMON X.

NAAMAN THE LEPER.

2 KINGS v. 13.

And his servants came near and spake unto him and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean.

IF rank and honours were any security against the changes and chances of this mortal life, we should never have read in the Sacred history that “Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, a great man with his master, and honourable, a mighty man in valour,” was a leper. He was afflicted with that loathsome disease which no art could heal, and which was regarded both by Jew and heathen, as inflicted and removable by God alone. In this deplorable condition, a little Hebrew captive—who had

been brought out of the land of Israel, and taken into his family, to wait upon his wife—suggested that application in her master's behalf should be made to Elisha the prophet. She said unto her mistress, “Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria, for he would recover him of his leprosy.” The king of Syria hearing this, and being anxious for the restoration of so valuable an officer, thought he could do much better for Naaman than by applying to the prophet. Instead of sending to the *prophet*, he wrote to, as he thought, a much greater person, even to the *king* of Israel, and sent him a variety of presents, together with a request that he would recover Naaman of his leprosy; presuming that the king of Israel could certainly do what a prophet of Israel could do. The king, on the receipt of this letter, was greatly distressed and perplexed. “Am I God,” he said, “to kill and make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.” He regarded this proceeding, on the part of the king of Syria, as a pretext for the renewal of a war with him;

and the name of war must have been hateful to him, seeing that in the last war his father had perished. The prophet Elisha hearing of the king's fears, desired that Naaman should be transferred to him; and he should know that there was a prophet in Israel. Naaman came with his horses and chariot, and stood before Elisha's door. The prophet instead of going out to him and striking his hand over the place, and calling on the name of the Lord, as Naaman expected; sent a messenger to him, directing him to go and wash in Jordan seven times, and he should be clean. Naaman was greatly angered. The direction was so simple, and the means seemed so inadequate. To wash in Jordan, where many lepers had probably washed, and none had been healed; to wash seven times, that his credulity might be more conspicuous—if the waters of Israel, or of any other land, had been possessed of this healing efficacy, the remedy had been long since known; and why, forsooth, was Jordan to be preferred before the nobler rivers of his own country, the Abana and Pharpar? Thus we may suppose he debated in his mind, and he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants—encouraged, pro-

bably, by the Hebrew maid, whom we have already noticed—expostulated with him: the remedy, if unlikely, was, nevertheless, prescribed by a prophet of the Lord; and, if the waters of Jordan had no healing efficacy, still there might be virtue in obedience; and they reasoned with him, “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean.” Naaman was persuaded. He went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Full of gratitude he returned to the prophet, he and all his company, and acknowledged before him that there was no God in all the earth but in Israel. He then offered Elisha certain presents, which the prophet declined to accept; and, on taking his leave, requested two mules’ burden of earth from the land of Israel, that he might build an altar, free from idolatrous pollution, to the Lord God in his own country; avowing his determination that thenceforward he would not sacrifice to other gods, but unto the Lord; and adding, “in this thing the Lord pardon thy servant,

that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon — when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.” And Elisha said unto him, “Go in peace.”

This portion of the narrative is most fruitful in interest and instruction. Let us remark on Naaman's circumstances; the Hebrew captive through whom he heard of Elisha; the simplicity of the means ordained for his recovery; and the character of his conversion.

First, we are to remark on Naaman's circumstances. The captain of the host of the King of Syria was a leper. There is doubtless a wise and religious end to be served by every dispensation of Providence; and it is not difficult to discern ample uses of affliction, especially in the cases of the great. When all is well with us, pride and forgetfulness of God too often take hold of us; but affliction opens our eyes to our actual condition of being, our real dependence and wants; and constrains us to reflect on what provision of happiness we have made apart from things of sense, and for that season which will

surely come, when the fashion of this world shall have passed away. But, beyond these and the like uses of affliction, another is most evident. Much of the moral government of this world is carried on by the influence of example; teaching by matter of fact and by eyewitness, what the ear might be slow to receive, and the perverse mind disposed to dispute. And, examples being more extensively beneficial when exhibited in prominent situations, the relative worth and dependent tenure of this world's wealth and honours are most powerfully inculcated in the instance of the rich and great, abounding in superfluities, and yet, by some visitation of Providence, disabled from enjoyment. The man of low condition, suffers in secret; and his affliction teaches not beyond a very contracted circle: but when a great man falls, or is overtaken by calamity, the instruction penetrates to the remote corners of the land; proclaiming to the high, as well as the mean, that as no class is, by the will of God, exempt from the course of this life's accidents, so there is no room for the presumption that, in regard of the future, there is any respect of persons with God.—But Naaman was a leper in more than one sense. This ‘great

man with his master, and mighty man in valour,' was diseased in soul as well as body; he was a heathen and an idolater. Alas! how many, illustrious in the annals of warfare have been, in the height of their glory, altogether ignorant or careless of God, and their souls. How many have been content with their country's praise and recompense, and never cultivated a hope beyond! They have fought and bled for their land; they have been bulwarks of a nation's freedom; they have delivered from slavery and death: but whilst eminent as benefactors of their country; they have little considered how they themselves would be advantaged if, having gained the whole world, they should be cast away and lose their own souls. The pride of battle, and the thanksgivings of men, have blinded them to the importance of that anxious inquiry, how stands their account with God? and many have been borne to the grave amidst a nation's tears, who have received their reward in this life; and to whom their remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment. But—whilst this has been the case with some—we rejoice that there have been others equally distinguished in the service of

their country, who have also been eminent for their zeal in the service of God, and have consecrated their laurels at the foot of the cross. Having been religiously trained, they had the courage and wisdom to adhere to the good old way, in the face of the varied and powerful temptations, which peculiarly encompass the soldier's path; or, the manifest perils of their profession admonished, that they should not trust in their bow or in their spear, but look up to Him that is mighty in battle and able to deliver; or, sickness or bereavements awakened them to a sense of the things which make for peace; or, they were brought to the knowledge of truth and salvation by some simple, perhaps, yet mysterious, ordering of the ways of Providence.

And this last was Naaman's case,—he was healed of his leprosy, bodily and spiritual, through the instrumentality of one, to whom least of all he could have looked for such benefits. And, if we consider the circumstances, it is not possible I think, that any religious mind can fail to discover the finger of God. That Naaman should have had a Hebrew servant in his family—that he himself should have been a

leper; and that he should hear, through that servant, of the prophet Elisha, and in consequence of his recovery become a worshipper of the only true God—these are circumstances, which in our haste we might reckon in the number of those fortuitous coincidences, as they are called, which happen frequently; and are forgotten, almost so soon as they have occurred. If, however, we examine more closely into the particulars, and mark the connexion and nice adaptation of each to other; we shall find, I conceive, sufficient traces of design to warrant us in setting down Naaman's case, as an illustration of the doctrine of a particular Providence. If, for example, this captive had not been a Hebrew; if she had not been placed in an idolatrous family; if this idolatrous family had not been Naaman's; if during the time of her servitude, neither before nor after, her master had not been afflicted; if his disease had not been the leprosy in particular; if all these contingencies had not concurred with the exactest precision of time, place, and condition, Naaman had probably continued to the day of his death an idolater, and God had been spoiled of that glory which accrued to him by the conversion of this heathen

nobleman, eminent for rank and character in the bosom of an idolatrous land. Here was an end accomplished worthy of that God who has always watched over the interests of his church,—can we say that God did not concern himself with the means by which it was brought to pass? We cannot say it; for in no case can we draw the exact line of partition between divine and human agencies: and why should we wish to deny it? It is readily granted that God exercises a providential control over kingdoms and nations; wherefore think it a thing improbable that he should interpose in the affairs of individuals, when we know that in many cases the fate of empires is clearly interwoven with individual conduct? Whatever of mystery there may be in the doctrine, it is undoubtedly the teaching of Scripture, that there is a Providence watching over the concerns and proceedings of individuals; and our Lord himself seems to warrant us in setting down Naaman's case as an exemplification of the same. He saith "there were many lepers in Israel, in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed saving Namaan the Syrian;" intimating not only that the heathen were sometimes preferred before

the people of God as objects of divine mercy, but also—considering the connexion in which this text is found—that Naaman's recovery was altogether of divine ordering; Naaman having been sent to Elisha, as Elijah had been sent to the widow of Sarepta. And as to the subject in general, Solomon saith “the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord;” shewing that the Providence of God is so minute and also universal in its operations, that it is not inactive even in the most fortuitous of events, such as the casting of lots. And our blessed Lord declares “that the very hairs of the head are numbered;” and that “not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the knowledge of our heavenly Father;” and the histories of Joseph, Moses, David, and our blessed Lord himself, have always been regarded as strong and satisfactory examples of what is here delivered in word. A doctrine thus established and practically exhibited, ought not to be laid aside after the simple hearing. If religiously and temperately entertained, it will often invest the commonest events with a lively and pleasing interest; it will admonish to the love and fear of Him who neither slumbereth nor

sleepeth, and “whose are all our ways;” it will be a powerful antidote against all presumption and undue confidence in ourselves; for when our heart deviseth our way, we shall be warned that there is one greater than our heart, and the Lord directeth our steps, ordereth our goings, whether this or that shall prosper: and it will forbid to despair, for this would be to limit an Infinite power, and to restrict an universal agent. If we are in prosperous circumstances, it will teach us to look higher than to industry and prudence as the fountain of our success; if we are in adversity, it will help us to go on our way rejoicing in a humble hope that some great purpose, not known to us, but known to God, may be in secret progress, and that we are perhaps being led by a way which we know not, to some most desirable consummation. Little did Naaman suspect that his most odious disease would eminently tend to his spiritual welfare; little did the Hebrew maid imagine that her servitude would be instrumental in diffusing the glory of God through a heathen land: Naaman was not of his own choice a leper; she was not of her own pleasure, a captive; it was not of his own will

that Joseph was sold and thrown into prison; neither did Moses choose that he should be cast upon the waters; and many, besides these, and in all generations, have been able to trace the most important results from events over which they had no control; or in which they had no share, or which they would by no means have preferred; but which, now that they can look back upon them, appear as the first and necessary link of a consistent and perfect chain; and bear all evidences of having been designed by the Supreme master and builder of our fortunes. If we think of these things in seasons of trouble and sorrow, the bitterness of spirit shall be moderated. What time and chance and man seem to mean for our harm, God may mean for our good.

The next portion of the narrative instructs us in the importance of paying strict obedience to divine ordinances, however simple they may be in form, or insufficient they may appear in our eyes. Naaman expected that Elisha would have come out to him and have called upon the name of the Lord his God, and struck his hand over the place; but Elisha enjoined him simply to wash seven times in the Jordan. Had Naaman

washed in any other stream; had he minished aught of the times, his leprosy had remained. This ought to suffice to our direction, in respect of the sacraments and other means of grace prescribed by divine authority. The Gospel recognises no empty ordinances; and, perhaps, no mere ceremonies or observances, without a spiritual design or use, were ever imposed by command of God, even under the old dispensation. If there were no natural or typical virtue in the thing itself, there was virtue in obedience. Under the Gospel, Christ hath appointed baptism of water as the medium of the new birth; the communion of the consecrated elements of bread and wine, for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls. However unconnected these outward acts may seem with any spiritual benefit, however inadequate as means to an end—the wise inquiry is, are they of divine ordinance? They certainly are. Then it is not for us to reply against God, or to sit in judgment upon His way of salvation. If God hath said, it is for man to hear, bow and obey; if He hath said, ‘this do and thou shalt live;’ this we must do, or ‘there is no life in us.’ His sacraments are means of grace; we must devoutly embrace

the means, if we would partake of the grace. “God,” saith St. Paul, “hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;” and this is verified, not only by the humble instruments of which he made use for the spread of the Gospel, and by which the wisest of philosophers were confounded; but it is verified also in the simplicity of those means which he hath ordained for the rise and sustenance of the spiritual life. The baptism of water, and the communion of the sacred elements, are not such ordinances as ‘the wise in this world’ would have ordained to their respective ends; *they* had never said, ‘wash and be clean,’ ‘eat and live,’ —*they* had given some great thing to be done, in the doing of which the pride of man had been consulted: but the ordinances of God are like Himself, and bear the impress of proceeding from Him. Mysterious simplicity is His nature and character; and His ordinances are simple, and, like Himself, they may easily be understood so far as is necessary for us to know and obey; and, like Himself, they are mysterious in those points which are left for faith to receive on competent authority. Their simplicity leaves us without excuse if we neglect them; their mystery affords

room for the exercise of that humility in which we should be clothed, and which is the only dress which becomes a sinful and responsible being.

The concluding portion of the narrative gives us to understand that Naaman, having been healed of his leprosy, and on his return from the prophet, professed his determination not to sacrifice to any heathen idol, but unto the God of Israel; "only might the Lord pardon him if, in his attendance on his master, he should bow himself down in the house of Rimmon." To this request, the prophet answered, 'Go in peace.' As the passage stands in our version, Elisha is represented as conniving at an idolatrous performance on the part of Naaman. But the prophet could hardly have sanctioned so dangerous a precedent, or a practice of such manifest peril to the principles of a new convert; neither is it likely that Naaman himself, in the warmth of his zeal for the only true God, and in the first ebullition of feeling, would have adverted, at the instant, to any considerations of worldly policy. To meet the difficulty, an eminent Hebraist has suggested that the passage should be rendered in the *past* tense, so that

Naaman, instead of asking pardon if he should in future transgress, craved forgiveness for his former conduct. "In this thing, may the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master *hath* gone into the house of Rimmon to worship, and he leaned on my hand, and I bowed myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bowed myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." And Elisha said unto him, 'Go in peace.' This rendering obviates the difficulty. Naaman confessed that he had been an idolater, and hinted that he had transgressed rather as a courtier than through any conscientious principle; but henceforth he was resolved to sacrifice unto none, but unto the God of Israel. Well might the prophet give his blessing and say, 'Go in peace;' for such giving of peace is in strict accordance with that Scripture which saith, "when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

And we cannot, perhaps, dismiss our subject more appropriately than by proclaiming, on the authority of the instance before us, and in conformity with abundant gracious assurances in

Holy Writ, that whatever may have been our past errors, whatever may be our present failings, if we will now firmly resolve and strive with God's grace to walk as becometh those who have been redeemed of the Lord ; our sins and iniquities shall be remembered no more : not that by our repentance we can undo the past, or make amends to God for it ; not that repentance can wash away the pollutions of guilt ; but such are the merciful conditions of the Christian covenant ; " grace, mercy, and peace to every one that loveth the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." In gratitude, then, for the great things which the Lord hath done for us, especially in the gift of his Son our Saviour ; and for the sure hope of pardon and peace which the Gospel holds forth to the faithful penitent ; let us resolve, with Naaman, that henceforth we will not sacrifice unto any god save unto the Lord. And that we may keep steadfastly to our purpose, let us strengthen it by a devout and constant use of those means of grace which are of divine appointment ; by prayer ; by a thoughtful communion of the Lord's body and blood ; by studying the Word of truth and salvation ; and by habitual worship-

ing in the temple. And if, in an age impatient of what is tried and approved, and curious beyond what is needful for practice—it be demanded of us, Why are we scrupulous in matters which thousands disregard? why are we constant and immoveable in practices which many have outgrown, or laid aside?—the briefest answer to others, and the most quickening encouragement to ourselves, will be, that we are walking in the way of God's commandments; a way which changes not at man's pleasure, or according to his convenience, or his notions of propriety and use; a way, the wisdom of which does not always accord with human policy, and the profitableness of which is not always immediate and instant at every turn; but still it is *God's* way; and, whatever may be other men's choice, “as for ourselves and our houses we will keep the way of the Lord.”



SERMON XI.

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD.

REVELATION xiv. 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.

As 'there is a time to be born,' there is also 'a time to die;' and this last event happens to the good as well as the evil. Born into the world, in like circumstances of weakness, the good man goes forth to his work and his labour until the evening; and whether his day be of the summer's brightness, or the spring's variableness, or the winter's gloom, its close is so far undistinguished from the termination of the wicked man's career that he lies down in death,

and his body is mingled with its parent earth; "Dust he is, and that which is mortal unto dust returns." But it were a sad thing to believe that this is his end; that when a good man breathes out his breath, it were a pestilential blast, if not destroying the memory and influence of his virtues, yet annihilating all their use and advantage to himself.

This we are unwilling to believe. And the Scripture forbids us to believe it; and, instead of permitting us to indulge in such cheerless suspicions, holds forth the most glorious hopes. And whilst many passages might be adduced, the one selected for the text gives in effect the most solemn and absolute denial to the vain and melancholy imagination that death is the righteous man's end, the limit of his hopes, as it is the boundary of his earthly exertions in the cause of God and man, and virtue; "I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." The words were delivered by an audible voice from heaven; they were commanded to be written; they were confirmed by

the solemn asseveration of the Spirit. Let us ponder them, that we may share in the comfort which they speak, under the bereavement of Christian friends; and that we ourselves may be so admonished that, when the last common event shall happen to us, they whom we leave behind may be enabled to take up the joyful burden, and ourselves fail not of the blessedness promised.

First, let us consider the blessedness as it is here described; secondly, the time when it begins; thirdly, the parties to whom it belongs.

The blessedness here spoken of is negatively and positively described; “they rest from their labours, their works do follow them.”—“They rest from their labours”—the sense of this is obvious, that they rest from the troubles, sorrows, sufferings, infirmities, miseries of this present life. To Christians in ordinary this is an assurance of no mean worth. Without underrating the delights of this life, for which as God’s gifts we ought to be deeply thankful, it is nevertheless true of human life that it is so associated with vexations, losses, and sufferings, so liable to change, so dark and uncertain in its progress and issue, that the language of our Church is always

justified when, without private knowledge of the circumstances of any departed in the faith, we give hearty thanks to Almighty God that it hath pleased Him to deliver them out of the *miseries* of this sinful world. They may have been cut off in their prime, with their affections in free and joyous exercise, their faculties of mind and body in full vigour, their prospects bright and their hopes unalloyed; but however favourable their circumstances were or seemed to be, whoever considers the vicissitudes of health and strength, of fortune and character, which lie hid in the womb of the future, the cares and griefs which oftentimes suddenly overcloud that horizon on which no dark spot was once to be seen; although he may be unable to trace the just application of our Church's language in any particular case, yet must he allow it to be founded on the warrant of human experience; and that, in the language of the Preacher, there is reason to "praise the dead which are already dead in the Lord, more than the living, which are yet alive," and subject to so many vicissitudes of a painful character.

But "rest from their labours" means not only deliverance from the power and fear of such

changes and chances, but, in the instance of the righteous, rest from all conflicts with sin, whether working by the instrumentality of the world, the flesh, or the devil ; rest from the harassing of wicked lusts and passions, from struggling with temper, from the agitations of strong contending interests, from the contradiction of sinners, from the opposition of the worldly minded, from the scorn of the proud, from the vexation with which every good man beholds the triumphs of vice and the dishonour that is done to virtue. And if, under the ordinary circumstances of the Christian life such deliverance is desirable and the prospect of it to be hailed with joy, how truly and sincerely must it have been longed for by those to whom the promise is emphatically directed ; the saints and martyrs of the Christian Church, who, in patience possessing their souls, maintained the Christian warfare, fought the good fight of faith, subject not only to the common evils of humanity and its ordinary vicissitudes of a moral and temporal nature, but in the face of the powers of the earth, leagued together for their destruction, and led on by the malignity of hell ! How heartily must they have prayed, in submission

to a higher will, for rest from their labours; how must they have longed for that event of God and nature which should release them from their fiery trials, place their faith and constancy out of the reach of jeopardy, and enable them to contemplate in undivided peace and security, and without possibility of relapse, that tribulation through which they had entered the kingdom of heaven.

“Rest from their labours” is, however, but part of the blessedness of those who die in the Lord. “Their works do follow them;” or, as the sense of the word more accurately is, their works *accompany* them, go with them. First, when they die, the remembrance of their works dies not, but keeps them company. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we are given to understand that the wicked shall certainly remember the past: “Son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things;” and more surely is this doctrine delivered to us in our Lord’s description of the final judgment, where it is represented to us that those duties of Christian love which they ought to have performed, but which they neglected, shall be

brought to their recollection : “ I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not : ” then shall they answer, “ Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ? Then shall he answer them saying, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. ” The same process, we are told, shall be adopted in the instance of the righteous ; only of course with a different result. And although we do not assert that the description is to be interpreted to the very letter, yet it seems not that it can hold good in any sense or degree, unless the wicked and the righteous shall respectively remember their past course and conduct. It would appear, indeed, to be a necessary part of the doctrine that we shall be recompensed “ according to our deeds,” that we shall also be *conscious* of our deeds ; that we shall remember the cup of cold water given in the faith and love of Christ, when we receive our reward for it ; and that he that reapeth plenteously, shall be conscious that he plenteously sowed. Neither does there seem to be any sufficient reason wherefore we should

desire to exclude such reminiscences from the abodes of the blessed. In many cases they would be replete with joy; in other cases, all imagination of grief—which we may think would be associated with such recollections—is precluded by the greatness of the blessedness, the final result of all. The recollection of works of love and usefulness, of victories achieved over our tempers and habits, of our delight in prayer and worship, of happiness which we diffused, of misery which we remedied: these cannot be accounted recollections which shall disturb or impair the felicity of the righteous. And if to such remembrances there be added also the recollection of weaknesses, sins and troubles and afflictions, there will be one thought, one reality, which shall spoil such remembrance of all properties injurious to peace, and convert it into a cause of more abundant thanksgiving and joy; the thought and reality that, by divine grace, they have escaped the peril of all that threatened their soul's ruin, and strove for the dominion over them; and that they have entered into the "joy of their Lord." If they remember their weaknesses, they shall remember also that abounding grace of God which has proved their sufficiency;

if they remember their sins—since no lust can harass where nothing that defileth can enter—they will remember also that the handwriting against them is clean blotted out by the blood of the Redeemer; if they remember their trials and sorrows, they will know also that they are past and for ever, and changed into blessings. It is not difficult to imagine that such remembrances; recollections of sins forgiven, of evils triumphed over, may exist without impairing the saints' blessedness, and only furnishing them with constant food of praise and devotion; as, in this life, the good man remembers his past troubles and transgressions, and derives satisfaction from a contemplation of his escape from them. Nay, even if in recollecting the past, the righteous should remember things once most precious, and have cause to believe that they are lost to them for ever, such as bosom affections and friendships; still even in this case, we may not think that such remembrances shall be any sensible minishing of their joy; for higher principles than those of any finite affection or ill-bestowed love will then prevail, and be all in all with them; the principle of boundless gratitude to Him who hath saved their souls from

death; the principle of absolute submission to His dispensations whom the angels love and adore, unaffected in their allegiance by the judgments visited on their brethren, who 'kept not their first estate;' the principle of undivided confidence that the Judge of all the earth doth right; and that He, who foreknew all things, in wisdom and goodness foreordained also what should most certainly promote the welfare of the universe and his own glory.

By "their works following them," we are chiefly, however, to understand, that the righteous shall reap the recompense of their faith and deeds. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," saith St. Paul, "neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." The language of man, scarcely competent to deal with things of sense, must be utterly insufficient to treat of those matters which 'the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard;' still we may speak that which God hath revealed unto us by his Spirit. The condition of the blessed is spoken of under the images of a 'kingdom,' a 'crown, a 'treasure,' a 'crown of life, of righteousness, and of glory,' a 'prize,' 'the prize of the high calling

of God,' an inheritance in the kingdom of God, in which those "who were faithful in few things," are made rulers over many things, and appointed to reign with Him. The kingdom is everlasting; the crown unfading; the inheritance incorruptible. It is a state of rest from persecution and affliction, from worldly privations and sufferings, sorrows and anxieties; 'they hunger no more, neither thirst any more.' "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." And the state thus characterised by the absence of all evil, is distinguished also by the presence of all spiritual joys; it is one of glory, honour, peace, and of pleasures for evermore.—But as the time would fail, if we were to mention all that is directly and figuratively said of the glories of the celestial habitation; I shall add only that which perhaps may strike the minds of many more forcibly than any verbal detail. The blessedness of the saints is represented to be such, that the severest earthly losses and sufferings ought to be accounted 'all joy' and gain, if through them this blessedness may be attained. "Rejoice, and be exceeding

glad"—said our Lord to his first disciples, who were afterwards, and as he must have foreknown, exposed to the most bitter persecution and excruciating torments—"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." And in conformity with this view is the energetical language of St. Paul, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Next to the blessedness spoken of in the text—we are to remark on the time when it begins. It is in death: "Blessed are the dead." Godliness, we know, is "profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." And in the approval of conscience, in the countenance of the Word of God, in the approbation and satisfaction of the wise and good; and in a generally safer and pleasanter passage through life; the godly man reaps part of the profitableness promised: but the peculiar blessedness of the righteous man begins when he dies! Yes! when our hearts are heavy with grief, and our eyes swollen with tears; when we are sorrowing as if all hope were blighted, and all comfort banished from the

heart, by the loss of some good man; it is then that the Scripture teaches us his blessedness begins. More or less of happiness may have belonged to him whilst he sojourned on the earth; but it was partial, unstable, unsatisfactory—*Now* he is blessed. It is not said, “Blessed *shall* be the dead;” as if he should straightway in death pass into a condition of unconsciousness, and years or ages might intervene between his death and his blessedness. Nor yet is it said, “Blessed *may* be the dead which die in the Lord;” as if the blessedness were contingent on what the living might do, as the church of Rome would teach. If he dies in the Lord, his Judge is his Mediator and Intercessor, and, as he needs no other, no other can serve him. Neither of these is said—but it is said, “Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth,” that is, immediately. Oh! wherefore do we not, in seasons of distressing bereavement, call forth to our aid and consolation this most comfortable text? Why do not we ourselves apply it? why do we leave it, as it were, locked up in the Word of God, and not draw it forth from the spiritual treasury, before grief has had its, sometimes, desolating sway? It is read and believed

at the grave—why not ponder it, believe it, at the very moment when the spirit leaves its frail abode? Our religion says, that the righteous man's reward begins when this life closes; that he receives "the end of his faith," when he receives the "end of his life." For what did he live, toil, endure conflict with temptation, suffer wrong and privation? was it not that he might "die the death of the righteous?" and, when such death comes, and his labours are crowned, are we to count all lost when he has gained all? or, by reason of our loss, to think nothing of his gain? It is to be feared that there is often much of selfishness in our sorrows; often somewhat of unbelief. We hold to religious truths until our confidence in them is put to a practical test; and then we are found wanting. We comfort others in affliction with the merciful revelations of Scripture, and do all we can to force upon their minds a conviction of their veritableness; but, in our own troubles, we are too disposed to treat those revelations as unreal, and to reduce our faith to a level with "the things that are seen."

The only remaining matter to be handled in consideration of the text, is "to *whom* this

blessedness belongs?" The answer is brief, "to those who die in the Lord." And first, undoubtedly, holy martyrs are meant. This is evident from the context, wherein mention is made of the patience of the saints in the midst of persecution; and there is, besides, authority for rendering 'dying *in* the Lord' so that it shall imply 'dying *for* the Lord.' But this blessedness pronounced on saints and martyrs is not to be considered restricted to them; for St. Paul—speaking of conscientious Christians, who in all their proceedings have special regard to the Lord and his glory—says of them, that "whether they live or die they are the Lord's;" and they cannot be His without being blessed indeed; so that the blessedness extends to all who die in the faith, fear, and favour of the Lord.

And now, having said as much as seemed required in exposition of the text, it is my duty to urge my hearers that they follow after the blessedness promised. It is blessedness in *death*. The Christian must not be disappointed if it come not before; but let him wait in faith and patience, and though it tarry it will surely come. It is blessedness in *death*. What a mighty and peculiar gift of God, to take us up when all things

else leave us, or we leave them; to make us blessed in the absence of all things which are commonly accounted essential to happiness! Yet such blessedness—independent of this world's goods—must exist somewhere, if religion be not altogether a fable. The fashion of this world passeth away; riches, honours, friends, serve us not in the hour of our departure. If there is a future state of reward for the righteous, it must be independent of these perishable things, on which many set their hearts as if they were the good things which God hath provided for his servants. Now, have we sufficiently thought of this? We say that we are seeking heaven first and above all things; 'have we then a hearty belief of blessedness, apart from the circumstances of this present life?' Many will acknowledge that the present things are so entwined with their views, desires, and affections, that they cannot conceive of happiness apart from them all. But if heaven is a spiritual state, it must be unassociated with most of them; it may be separate from them all. Oh! then let us strive to imbibe somewhat of that principle which possessed, actuated, and comforted the noble army of martyrs. They had somehow

“so learned Christ” that they could rejoice in the destitution of friends and substance, in the horrors of a dungeon, in the midst of the most cruel tortures. Let us seek somewhat of their principle. They were neither fools nor mad. The illustrious monuments which they have left in their labours prove the one: their deliberate, sound, and consistent conduct and reasoning, in the evil hour, prove the other. How was it that they could rejoice, when we should falter, perhaps, in the comparatively ordinary virtues of bearing and forbearing? Doubtless they were taught of God; they were aided by grace and strength from on high: but, next to this, they believed in their hearts that they who died in and for the Lord were blessed; they had a firm immoveable persuasion that death to them was gain; and if the malignity of men or devils could have aggravated the horrors which they experienced a thousandfold, we may believe that this principle would still have borne them up. Let us learn to place the same thorough confidence in Scripture. No one can tell us what the blessedness of heaven is: the Scripture says that they who die in the Lord *are* blessed: let this suffice. No angel nor archangel could

explain this blessedness, for we have not faculties to receive it; but it should suffice that it is a promise of God and sealed by the Spirit of God; and, taking it as our polar star, let us follow after it in faith and holiness, however dark may be our earthly path; however painful our trials. Many things may make us partially blessed in life: none but God can give us blessedness in death. And, oh! how often does He impress on the human countenance, and proclaim with human lips, that this promise is sure, and in process of realization. Pale, weak, and destitute of earthly comfort, the sufferer lies; shut out from this world and its enjoyments as truly as if death had passed; but the eye opens, and bears witness to joy within; the lips move not in discontent and regret, but in declaring a substantial happiness, and only the desire of its ampler realization. They who are present at such a scene, doubt not that the blessedness is real and sure; let us pursue it that it may be ours. Rest from the griefs and pains of life is that which we may one day heartily desire; rest from its evils ought always to be the soul's seeking; rest from its vanities will come in the course of nature. In the faith and fear and love of the

Lord, let us labour that those works which follow us may be replete with joy. Although we cannot think that the remembrance of evil shall be any cause of grief to the souls that are perfected for ever; yet the remembrance of good may increase their happiness. Let us then wrestle with our tempers, so that we may remember the victories achieved; let us contend with the world, so that we may remember duties performed and virtues cherished, in spite of its contempt or opposition; let us deal with our troubles, so that we may remember them only as steps in the progress of faith, holiness, and virtue; let us train our children, so that none of them may be lost through our apathy or neglect; so govern our households that we may not fear to meet them as witnesses at the bar of God. Keeping always in view the blessedness which at any moment may be the true Christian's recompense, let us contend with every evil as if it may be our last; with every temptation as if the victory to be achieved were the last jewel demanded for the perfecting of the crown of life. Let us keep ourselves habitually to God's commandments, and reverently to his ordinances; and especially to that one which faithfully ob-

served shews the Lord's death until his coming, and which by its solemn preparations is eminently calculated to preserve us in the Christian faith and duty; and then, come when our Lord may, blessed shall be that servant whom his Lord findeth so doing; he shall quit the world as one who rightly understood the reason and end of his earthly being; he shall enter on death, meet for the kingdom of God.



SERMON XII.

DO, AND YE SHALL KNOW.

JOHN vii. v. 17.

If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

THERE are certain unbelievers who are not at ease in their unbelief, and make sundry attempts to free themselves from its dominion. Many fail of success through ignorance of the best way in which to proceed. They are dissatisfied with their unbelief, and, to remedy it, they perplex themselves, perhaps, with *controversial* writings; and the consequence is that they are tossed to and fro, as an argument is or appears to be more or less convincing: or they discuss religious topics with their friends, and the pride of debate being called forth, they find themselves unwittingly the opponents of the very cause

which they desire to espouse; and end rather confirmed than weakened in their doubts and prejudices; or, perhaps, for the removal of their unbelief, they apply themselves earnestly to the study of the Scriptures. Now, in respect of this last method no one will seriously imagine that I would attempt to discountenance the study of the Scriptures; on the contrary, this duty is notoriously one which every minister of the Reformed religion will labour most sedulously to promote; but, if any one think certainly to eradicate unbelief of heart by merely reading or studying the Bible, he labours under a great mistake; for a man may be ‘mighty in the word of God’ so as to be able to apply, explain, defend at every turn, and yet there may be in himself nothing beyond an historical acquaintance with the truth; no influential conviction which shall remedy his own infidelity, however useful he may become in counteracting that of others.

To produce *this* sort of knowledge of doctrine, the only one profitable to the individual himself, something most important is needed beyond the mere study of the Word of God, or the use of the other means commonly employed. And our Saviour instructs us in the text what it is.

He saith “if any man will do the will of God he shall know of His doctrine whether it be of God,” or whether he delivered it of himself as a *man*, simply for the purpose of acquiring fame, and ‘seeking his own glory.’ These words obviously import that, in the matter of *His* religion, there is an intimate and certain connexion between ‘doing’ and ‘believing;’ that the *practice* of God’s will is the key to the apprehension of Christ’s *doctrine*.

Let us give ourselves to a consideration of this sentiment from the mouth of our Lord. And, that we may proceed with some degree of regularity, let us first briefly notice what the *will* of God is; secondly, let us shew how, or in what way ‘doing His will’ leads to the apprehension of the heavenly character of Christ’s doctrine; and, thirdly, let us remark on the singular excellences of the knowledge which is obtained in this way.

First,—as to the *Will* of God. Here there cannot be need of any lengthened explanation. Whether we ask of the Bible, our consciences, or the present ordering of God’s Providence; the answer returned by each and all is, that the will of God is that we should be holy in order

to being happy. The Scriptures, in so many words, declare that the “will of God is our sanctification,” “he hath not called us unto uncleanness but unto holiness;” and saith Saint Peter, “the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Our consciences, moreover, demand holiness as essential to their rest and peace; the present economy of things too, is so constituted, that godliness, having “promise of the life that now is,” is supported by the laws and by universal opinion, however it may be neglected in practice; and Providential doings have so plainly the same significance, that few men, reflecting on them, consider them otherwise than as provocatives to godliness. All these point to holiness as the undoubted will of God, and the law by which we should walk. And as this is manifest, let us proceed to the second position laid down; namely, that by doing this will of God, or, in other words, by the practice of holiness, we shall attain to the knowledge that *Christ’s doctrine is of God*. But, in order to illustrate this, it may be expedient in the first instance to have an epitome of *Christ’s doctrine* before us; we shall, then, more easily trace the

connexion between the *practice* and the apprehension of *doctrine*.

Now, some principal doctrines of the Gospel are our own insufficiency to the work of holiness, the consequent necessity of divine grace and strength, and our final justification through faith in the meritorious performance and office of Christ. And, in respect of these doctrines, we assert that if any man will earnestly pursue holiness, he shall attain to the knowledge that they are and must be of *God*; the conviction arising in him and gaining strength, as he advances in holiness, that if such doctrines are not true, nor of God, the will of God *cannot* be done, assuming that will to be our sanctification and happiness. Let us suppose a man following after perfection of godliness; renouncing all evil works and habits; endeavouring to eradicate every lust, and perverse disposition; cultivating all virtue of thought and practice; and eagerly embracing every means by which the same may be promoted, and to the utmost: we say of such an one, first, that he shall not long pursue this course before a deep sense of his natural blindness and weakness shall be bred in him. The things omitted which ought to have

been done; the things done which ought to have been left undone; his irresolution in a good cause; the partial success of his most strenuous endeavours; the constant and powerful strugglings of temper, and their repeated triumphs over him,—these things shall convince him, that if holiness is God's will, it cannot be perfected by man's natural strength; that some superhuman provision is needed, or the purpose of God must fail. And if this conviction do not discover to him that the grace of God is our only sufficiency in all godly works, yet when Christ's doctrine of the sanctifying and renewing influences of the Holy Spirit is made known to him, he shall know in himself that it is precisely the doctrine which is demanded by the necessities of man; and also indispensable to the promotion of the counsel of God; seeing that the sanctification of the creature cannot be perfected without it. So also, advancing in holiness and to the utmost, what shall be his feeling as to his *success*? will it be that he hath done all, and more than all, that is commanded, even to the earning of everlasting felicity? Far from it—the practice of holiness (like progress in knowledge) shall render his deficiencies

more manifest; and he will reason with himself—"God hath commanded me to be holy in order to being happy; the more I strive after perfection, the more sensible I am that I cannot attain to it: is, then, the will of God nugatory? is his purpose left incomplete? or is there provision made for effecting that which I can never accomplish?" and he will be persuaded that 'following after righteousness' can be part only of the scheme of salvation, since it never can reach to a saving merit; and when the doctrine of Christ is preached to him, that He by his perfect obedience and sacrifice hath satisfied the law of God, he will know in himself how essential this doctrine is to the sinner's peace: and its nice adaptation to the sinner's wants, and also to the perfecting of the will of God, will persuade him immoveably (and in defiance of all mystery with which it is associated), that it is of God, and part of His counsel, who willeth not that any should perish.

Without pursuing the subject farther, enough, I should think, has been said in illustration, that if a man will do the will of God—do it indeed he never can—but if, according to the sense of the text, he will heartily endeavour to

do it, there shall arise in his breast that sense of the need of Christ's doctrines, to any perfect scheme of salvation, which shall convince him that they are of God, if the holiness and happiness of man are the Divine will.

And here may be the proper place for observing, that it is only in respect of *Christ's* doctrines that this connexion between 'doing the will of God,' and 'knowing of the doctrine,' is maintained. Our Lord himself said, "every man that hath learned of the Father cometh to me;" and this is true, not only directly but also conversely. On the one hand, if we do the will of God, we attain to the doctrine of Christ as the satisfaction of our wants; the crowning of our desires; the perfecting of our practice: but if we do the will of any other than God, we do not attain to the doctrine; if we follow our own heart's lust or any other way, so far from attaining to the doctrine, it becomes our aversion, or else it is made foolishness unto us. 'Doing the will of God,' we are not led to any other religious system than that of the Gospel; no other system having provision of sanctifying grace and remission of sin; and all other systems having somewhat in them, to which the practice

of perfect holiness is not the conductor, but to which it is opposed; countenancing impurity, or else being based on some moral defect, such as pride or ignorance, to which the work of holiness is adverse. And to this it may be added, as an overwhelming proof that the doctrines of Christ are of *God*, that, if we follow the doctrine of Christ, we infallibly do the will of God. Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise; these things are part of Christ's doctrine; and they are also confessedly the will of God; so that obeying Christ we undoubtedly obey God; and, moreover, that peace which is emphatically called 'the peace of God,' because none other can bestow it, is also infallibly produced in the conscience by walking after the teaching of Christ: what other proof can be required that Christ "was in the Father, and the Father in Him," and that He spoke "not of Himself, but the Father which sent Him gave Him commandment what He should say and what He should speak."

Having shewn that to him that doeth the will of God there shall arise a thorough con-

viction that the doctrines of Christ are of God; I proceed, in the third place, to a brief consideration of the superiority of the conviction thus obtained over every other. In the first place, knowledge obtained by doing the will of God is likely to be lasting and secure. A man may be changed from infidelity to belief by a sudden light bursting in upon his mind; but, then, there is danger lest some plausible and crafty argument should effect as sudden a relapse: this is less to be feared where the conviction has proceeded by the practice of godliness, for then the conviction is hedged around by habits of thinking, and by conduct most hostile to unbelief; both which require time for their destruction. Secondly, knowledge obtained by doing the will of God, has this great and singular advantage; that whereas the knowledge may come in other ways, in defiance of our natural wishes, by this method all prejudice is disarmed, “the ways of religion being ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace;” and the desires are brought to court the knowledge; enlisted in its favour; and they rejoice in its acquisition.

To him who *doeth* the will of God there

arises a sense of the necessity of the doctrines of the Gospel; he comes to want those very truths and revelations which the Gospel unfolds; and, so far from wishing the Gospel to be false, he hopes that it is true; and this is a great step towards the permanency of this conviction; for, if one learn that for which he has no taste; if he imbibe conviction in spite of his pleasure; he is always disposed to lay it aside: but not so, when in the first instance a taste for such knowledge has been created. A third advantage of knowledge obtained by *doing* the will of God is—that whilst we are learning, we are also doing, that which shall be profitable. We may study the evidences of religion for years, and all this while be unfruitful in any good work; but, by *this* method, time is not thus sadly abused; we are cleansing our hearts, and improving our morals—works which *must* be acceptable to God—whilst at the same time we are surely compassing that knowledge which is necessary to salvation. And, lastly, this method is to be preferred in that its uses shall remain even when faith is swallowed up in sight; the same *practice* of godliness which promotes belief shall

serve and adorn us at the resurrection of the just, and constitute our delight throughout endless existence; it shall not become obsolete in the kingdom of God: we know little of the state and occupations of the blessed, but that which we do know of them is, that by them the will of God is done after the same fashion by which it is done by the righteous on earth; only perfectly and purely and without ceasing.

I have now pursued the subject to the extent proposed; and my object has been to impress upon those who would obtain to the knowledge that the doctrines of Christ are of God, that they should follow holiness and to the utmost, as one of the best of methods. They will thus first come to feel the want of them; then, when the doctrines are made known to them, they will ^{*}thankfully acknowledge them as the same for which they have panted; they will delight in them, and be unwilling to discredit them, having the witness in *themselves*, in their wants, desires, and conviction, that they must be of God if his will is the holiness and happiness of man. And as this doctrine of our Lord's is not dependent on the single passage in our text, but is elsewhere enforced; so is there nothing peculiar in it to

distinguish it from the ordinary process to be adopted in matters of like kind. If our Lord saith 'do the will, and ye shall know of the doctrine,' we are elsewhere instructed that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" "that the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant." And when one of the Apostles demanded of our Lord, "How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world?" Our Lord's answer was, "if a man love me, he will keep my words;" intimating that *obedience* was the secret of such peculiar manifestation. And, indeed, so common is the doctrine in Scripture, that 'doing' and 'knowing' are closely connected, that the term knowledge is frequently employed in the sense of practice. And, upon reflection, this is indeed what we should have expected. We know that anything practical, must be learned by practice. Things speculative, may be learned by books and contemplation; but he that would learn to read or sing, must *practise* reading and singing; no book learning will serve him without practice: and, in the learning, he must practise much at first which he does not thoroughly comprehend, and

to the perfect understanding of which he can only hope to attain through the medium of practice. Even so do we say in the matter of Christ's doctrines—they all are practical: not one is given that has not practice for its end, and we say that practice is the best method by which to compass the doctrine. If a man would know Christ's doctrine of the efficacy of prayer; let him pray: if he would know Christ's doctrine of peace, let him follow peace: if he would know the doctrines of the miserable condition of man by nature, of sanctification by the Spirit, of the necessity of some superhuman scheme of salvation, such as is revealed in the Gospel; let him begin by taking that for granted of which he cannot possibly doubt, namely, that the will of God is our holiness and happiness; and, by doing that which he *must* know to be his obligation—'the will of God;' and then as many of the Samaritans believed in Christ, not because of what the woman of Samaria had told them, but because they had heard him themselves, so will he believe that Jesus is of God, having in himself the witness that such doctrines as His are indispensable to the sinner's peace.

This is the course which we recommend; and

would that we could prevail on unbelievers to prove its wisdom by experiment. We say if you would *know* what Christ hath taught, do what God hath commanded. His command is that we be holy: make holiness your chief and eager pursuit; break off your sins by righteousness; renounce your evil habits, dispositions, haunts and associates, and choose virtuous ones in their stead; give yourselves to prayer, and to the hearty endeavour of perfecting holiness in the fear of God; and you shall know that Christ's doctrine is of *God*. This is our advice; but it is not the pleasure of the unbelieving to follow it: they will not *do* what they *know*, in order to increase knowledge. They have doubts of Christ's worthiness, or they do not comprehend his doctrines; and some give themselves no farther trouble; and others, giving much pains, nevertheless overlook the immense importance of practice: they must be convinced (they say), before they can practise: we say to them, practise in order to be convinced; if you would learn religion, be thoroughly assured of its truth; *do* it. And, whilst this is the advice which we would press on the unbelieving, let me hope that there are those present who can

bear witness to its soundness and efficacy; many who, by long practice, have attained not to a speculative, but a vital knowledge that the doctrines of Christ are of God; have felt their power in raising them to righteousness; in freeing them from inward pollution; in purifying and exalting their nature: they know them to be of *God*, because they impart a strength, which is higher and greater than human; because they proclaim a peace which will bear probing, and which the thought of death and judgment does not disturb; because they inspire a comfort, which is proof against the changes and chances of mortal affairs; an assurance, over which they feel that the grave has no power. Christ hath said to them, “Come unto me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls:” they have gone unto Him in faith, humility, and obedience; they have found that rest which was promised; and they know whom they have believed, and are persuaded that His doctrines are of God, and that He is “the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.”

SERMON XIII.

JACOB AND ESAU.

ROMANS ix. 12.

It was said unto her—the elder shall serve the younger.

WHEN Abraham was seventy-five years old, the divine promise was given him, that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. When Isaac was born, the promise was renewed, and the patriarch assured that in him, that is, in his seed, it should be fulfilled. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob; but, before they were born, and before they could possibly have manifested their obedience or disobedience, the Lord said unto Rebecca, their mother, “the elder shall serve the younger.” When the children were grown up, Esau the elder was his father’s favourite, and the reason is stated in the sacred narrative: “Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison;” but, for

Rebecca's predilection for Jacob it is difficult to assign any other cause than this, that from the time when it was said unto her "the elder shall serve the younger" she regarded Jacob as the child marked out by a particular revelation from God as the inheritor of that promise which was first given to Abraham, and next to Isaac (to the exclusion of Ishmael), and now to Jacob (to the exclusion of Esau). The knowledge that Jacob was elected of God for some eminent distinction above his brother, was, so far as we can judge, the cause of her partiality towards him, and of her subsequently unnatural and unjustifiable proceedings towards Esau. And this knowledge was productive of much wickedness on the part of Jacob. Being assured that the promise was in his favour—in order to its accomplishment and to expedite its fulfilment, he took advantage of his brother's necessities, to purchase his birthright; of his father's blindness, to obtain by fraud the patriarchal benediction; and besides this, was guilty of gross immorality, uttering the most flagrant falsehoods in the presence of his aged parent, "I am Esau, thy firstborn, I have done as thou badest me."

These were the effects produced on such

righteous characters as Rebecca and Jacob by a foreknowledge of one of God's decrees. God had said, and he would have brought to pass, without such wickedness on their parts; but, these were the expedients to which they, knowing what He had said, resorted for the purpose of fulfilling His counsel. They did evil that good might come; and we may note, with profit to ourselves, that each was suitably punished for the evil which they did. Rebecca was for the rest of her days deprived of the society of her favourite son, who remained in exile until after her death; a fact speaking volumes to those parents who capriciously set their affections on one child to the prejudice of another. And Jacob, as he had deceived his father, so was he himself deceived in marriage; and, moreover, the fulfilment of that promise, which he had endeavoured to accelerate by craft and baseness, did not take place in his time, but was deferred to very distant generations.

We see in the cases of Rebecca and Jacob that a foreknowledge of the future was very hurtful to them. I shall say just enough to shew that it would be injurious generally, whether it should be of a temporal or spiritual

nature; and, if this is evident, it will be an easy inference, that any *science* affecting such knowledge ought to be discouraged; and any *doctrine*, pretending to it, can hardly be of God.

First—in respect of temporal matters, it is commonly admitted that a certain knowledge of the future would often be mischievous and generally unprofitable. If it were known to a man, at present at ease and in comfort, that he would certainly end his days in poverty and grief—since on our supposition the evil *must* take place—not only would a gloom take possession of him, and spread itself over his thoughts and pursuits, but he would relax in that diligence and that propriety of conduct, and that benevolent exertion of which, as things are ordered, himself and society are in the interval reaping the benefit. And if it were known to another in humble circumstances that he was destined to rise to a high and important station; if he had not recourse to wickedness—after the example of Jacob and Rebecca—whereby to hasten the consummation, there would very usually result an indifference to present enjoyments, a carelessness about present duties, and a reluctance to the discharge of them; and thus, again, the

individual and society would be sufferers in respect of happiness. There would be no room for the one to hope, and the other to fear; and if these props of the social fabric, and guides and solace of individual conduct were destroyed, the course of this world's affairs must proceed on altogether new and untried principles; and it is very apparent that there would be caused a considerable diminution of human felicity; for this world's enjoyments would lose much of their satisfactoriness and fulness, coming in the way of necessity and scarcely as the rewards of seeking; and the evils of life would be unmitigated and more than doubled by the certain expectation of them.

Such knowledge of the future would be prejudicial to us, and it is mercifully denied us; and if we have reason to be thankful for this, how much more abundant cause of gratitude is there, in the consideration that God hath kept to himself the knowledge of the issue of this life's probation. Suppose it were revealed to a man that he is infallibly set apart for everlasting felicity. The most obvious results to be anticipated are, that he would count himself to have apprehended; that he

would no longer 'serve the Lord with fear nor rejoice with trembling;' but, being possessed of the fullest assurance of individual salvation, would not only be filled with spiritual conceit, but relax in holy and benevolent works, as if they were works of supererogation. And, on the other hand, if it were certainly known to a man that he was sealed to perdition; here we at once perceive a wide field opened for the free and reckless indulgence of every iniquity. With certain misery before him, when this life shall have ended, why should he not reap the utmost gratification from the things of sense? utterly indifferent to the laws of God, and the salutary warnings of conscience; and careless of the laws of man, except, perhaps, and in so far as might be needful for his continuance in vice or crime. With the knowledge that there was no possibility of escape from such dreadful retribution, it would only be a solemn trifling with such an one to admonish him to repentance, to counsel him of his danger, to speak to him of Divine grace and the mercy of God in Christ.

Now if the evils and dangers which would flow from a certain knowledge of the future

are real and not imaginary, and such as have been stated; it is clear that any art or system proceeding on the affectation of such knowledge is of mischievous tendency, and such as no one who consults his own or society's welfare will encourage; seeing that a conceit of knowledge is equally with, and more commonly than, knowledge itself a motive of conduct, and productive of good or evil. And the instances are not few in which persons who have yielded to the conceit of such knowledge, have been woful sufferers by allowing the pretended revelation to prey on their minds; and perhaps to direct them to a course of proceeding which has ended in their shame. The future will be known to us when it comes; and, as it is made up of successions of the present, if we habitually prepare its way and bring it to pass, in obedience to the Word of God and the experience of the wise, we have the surest warrant that can be given to us, that it shall be that which is most expedient for us, if not precisely according to our heart's desire.

But it cannot be necessary for me to dwell on the ignorant error of seeking a knowledge of one's temporal fortunes: this is uniformly

condemned, as the fruit of weakness or presumption. There is another matter of greater, because of everlasting importance, and to which I shall give ampler consideration. If any art or science is mischievous which pretends to a knowledge of the future events of this life, we cannot say less of any doctrine which affects the same knowledge in respect of eternity. Now this is the nature of that system which is known amongst us as the Calvinistic; for it is part of this system, that they who are elect to eternal life have themselves the fullest and an imperturbable assurance of the same; amounting, in its effects at least, to certainty of knowledge. It is not my intention to enter on the examination of the system at large; but as it professes to derive some support from the case of Jacob and Esau (which is before us), I shall just explain that that case offers it no countenance whatever. Before Esau and Jacob were born, God said "the elder shall serve the younger." Now the decree was not fulfilled in the *persons* of the individuals named; and the election, we have much ground for asserting, was not absolute or unconditional. It was not of the individuals that this was said; for Esau

never served Jacob: on the contrary, Jacob fled the country through fear of Esau; remained abroad for many years; sent a supplicatory message to his brother; and, previously to their reconciliation, bowed himself seven times before him. It was in their descendants only, and the nations derived from them, that this decree was accomplished; and even in this sense not until many ages had passed. The descendants of Esau were a great and flourishing people, whilst Jacob's were slaves in Egypt. It was not before the time of David that the Edomites, descendants of Esau, were first subdued, and then only partially and temporarily: and it was about the end of the first century of the Christian æra that they ceased to exist as a distinct people. It is evident, therefore, that the election was of nations and not of individuals; and being of nations, it was certainly not unto eternal life, for the Jews were cut off because of unbelief. And there is nothing forbidding this application of the prophecy, in the use which the Apostle made of it in the chapter from which our text is taken. He is there discoursing, not of God's election of *individuals* to eternal life, but of his choice of some and

rejection of others to be the head of the Church, the progenitors of the Messiah, and the stewards of His mysteries; he is discoursing of God's dispensations, first, to the Jews, and, then, to the Gentiles; and his argument is, that as God in the first instance preferred Isaac to Ishmael for these great purposes, so afterwards he chose Jacob before Esau; and, lastly, the Gentiles to the Jews.

But, it may be answered, that even on this shewing there was partiality on the part of Almighty God in choosing Jacob before Esau for temporal purposes: and it may be asked was it not an *arbitrary* choice, seeing that it was made before the children were born; and, then, may it not be inferred that if God arbitrarily elects individuals or nations for temporal blessings, he may proceed in the same way in respect of spiritual and eternal? It cannot by any means be allowed us to draw such conclusions. It is perfectly gratuitous and unwarranted to assume that Jacob was arbitrarily chosen even for these temporal ends. St. Paul, indeed, says that he was chosen before he had done good or evil, but he does not say that his election did not embrace or proceed upon God's

foreknowledge of his fitness for the office and privileges to which he was appointed. And, if this is negative evidence against the use which some would make of this history, there is more direct proof in the preceding chapter, wherein he sets down God's foreknowledge as the basis of His predestination; "whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate;" and if predestination does not embrace such foreknowledge, it is difficult to perceive wherein it differs from the reasonless and horrible doctrine of fatalism. There is nothing in reason to forbid, and much in Scripture to establish, the belief that God's decrees comprehend this foreknowledge; and why not adopt this belief, that that which was foreknown was the basis of that which was decreed? Jacob was not faultless, for it is not allowed any flesh to glory; but, in all spiritual graces, he was eminently superior to his brother: he was a man of greater faith and virtue: and his posterity preserved the true religion and the worship of the One God, while the Edomites were sunk in idolatry. Esau, on the contrary, was not likely to be a faithful guardian of God's church, when, for a mess of pottage, he could part with

his birthright, to which there belonged the government of the family, the patriarchal blessing, and perhaps the office of priesthood; and to which, above all, there descended the covenant which God had made with Abraham, and which was to be continued through the first-born to remotest generations. Esau, too, was not suited to be a progenitor of the Messiah 'as the seed of Abraham,' when in defiance of his parent's injunctions and the Divine pleasure he married into a heathen family. And if in these particulars alone there is ample cause of his rejection, to these it may be added that we have evidence before us that he was a person of no ordinary depravity; for "Esau said in his heart the days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob;" he comforted himself with the prospect of his father's death that he might murder his brother.

Thus may we dispose of the instance of Jacob and Esau. The least we can say of it is, that if it be thought to favour an arbitrary election of nations for temporal purposes, which we do not think it does; it offers not the slightest shadow of support to the doctrine of the unconditional

election of individuals to eternal life. And as we do not believe such unconditional election to have any place in the divine economy, so we do not believe that there is vouchsafed to any individual, any *absolute* assurance of his salvation; any knowledge other than this, that if he do well he shall be accepted; if he persevere in faith and obedience to the end, he shall be saved. If there was room for St. Paul to entertain the possibility that even he might become 'a cast-away;' we do not think that any individual is so far privileged, above this eminent servant of God, that he may renounce all fear of falling whilst the possibility of falling remains. Yet, undoubtedly many have the conceit of this knowledge; and the conceit is as dangerous and oftentimes as mischievous as the knowledge itself would be; for by its means, many maintain their confidence as the elect of God, whilst they are chargeable with that wickedness of disposition or practice which is hateful to God; and which it is essential to the nature and character of God that he should not behold with complacency, much less admit to the highest privileges of his favour.

It would be unjust, however, to those whose

doctrine I am considering, if I were not to say that many of them would as earnestly as myself condemn the pretensions of such as account themselves the elect of God, whilst they are indulging in wilful sin: but, then, the rule by which they would condemn them is as objectionable as the doctrine itself. They would say that those who are predestinated to eternal life, are predestinated also “to be conformed to the image of the Son of God;” or, in other terms, are predestinated to a life of faith and holiness; so that a life of faith and holiness is a necessary attendant and evidence of such election. But if by this predestination to holiness is meant any constraining necessity on the part of God, by which the freedom of man is superseded; then, of course, man is transformed into a mere machine, and all the moral evil in the world is to be laid to God’s account; and to be charged to his partiality in not having necessitated all men alike. But, if by the doctrine that they who are predestinated to life, are also predestinated to holiness; they mean no more than that we must be holy, or else we cannot be ‘elect’ to eternal life—their doctrine is sound; but it is a pity that they clothe it in such mysterious and

doubtful dress; and do not put it forth in the plainer language of Scripture and of our Lord himself: "Whosoever shall do the will of God; the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."

If I have dwelt at some length on this part of our subject, it is not through any love of controversial topics, but, because I conscientiously believe that the doctrine in question is unscriptural, and of the most pernicious tendency, and one which, whenever it comes in our way, it is our duty to condemn. Calvinism, if it were preached in its purity, singleness, and boldness, is no other than that same doctrine of fatalism which the wicked in this and in every generation are ready enough to take to themselves in excuse of their lusts and iniquity; and the expounders of it are, or seem to be, so sensible of this, that rarely do they enforce it without, at the same time, inculcating doctrines of a counteracting nature, which save society indeed from much of the evil which would otherwise result, but which at the same time render the doctrine itself nugatory.

In concluding—I would advert for a moment to the main drift of this discourse, which was to

discourage a very natural but foolish anxiety to foreknow the future, either in respect of time or eternity. In the instance of Jacob and Rebecca this foreknowledge was the fruitful source of wickedness; and, considering the many evils which would result from it, we cannot but pronounce that God in mercy to us has kept it to himself. We do not covet it, without presumption; we cannot affect it without danger. Other knowledge and in abundance and sufficiency is vouchsafed to us. We need not ask of the stars what shall be our fortunes. We have the testimony of ages that a course of virtue and prudence is the surest way to “see many days;” and a life of diligence and uprightness the most certain path to honour. We need not be curious to learn to what evil we are prone; and by following which we shall be led to ruin; nor yet need we ask of a prophet for what we are most adapted, and in the pursuit of which we shall most certainly succeed: for, on the one hand, nature soon shews herself, and when she shews herself, reason and revelation fully instruct us how to deal with her, that we may subdue the evil; and, on the other hand, genius, although modest, is not such a prude that she will not

declare herself before some art or science has pointed out her existence or locality.

In the experience of ages, in the spontaneous manifestations of nature, in the approbation of conscience, in the encouragement of the wise and good, in the lights of reason and revelation; we have ample guides for our temporal safe conduct. And as to eternity—here the Word of God will not suffer us to doubt, but certainly declares that it shall be ‘according to the deeds done in the flesh.’ If, then, in past times we have been guilty of errors, immoral or irreligious in our conduct, lax in our duties, unjust in our dealings, harsh in our judgments; our path is open and plain: repentance cannot undo the evil which has been done, but it shall save from the accumulating of evil upon evil, and wrath upon wrath. And if it be sincere, and in the faith of Christ—the only hope of fallen man—it shall be the averting of wrath through His merits and mediation. But, perhaps, some will say that the greatest portion of their days and of a long life has been consumed in error, in thoughtlessness and sin, in carelessness about God and the soul, in wilful contempt of the offers of grace and salvation—shall their eternity be according

to the deeds done in the flesh? Their hope would be despair—if we had man to deal with; but our judge is the merciful, forbearing, forgiving God. Ages of uprightness could not purchase the gift of which He is the Giver; but it is not denied to a few years, nay days, if after a life of ingratitude, they be heartedly devoted to Him. “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.” Oh! with *this* certain knowledge before us, let us not spare any portion of the present, for idle speculations which cannot be gratified in this imperfect scene; but let us lay firm and parsimonious hold upon the present. To-day we are on the earth, in the possession of our faculties and privileges; the means of grace are open to us, the offer of salvation is laid before us; to-day we hear the word of exhortation; to-day we can turn to the right or the left, as the will of God demands; to-day we can confess our sins, and seek forgiveness through the merits and intercession of the Redeemer:—‘to-morrow’—alas! let us not speak of the morrow—whilst I should name it, some would be passing to the eternal world, and some, perhaps, who had trusted in

its dawn for the most important purposes—and whilst we should speculate about the morrow “He that sitteth in the heavens might laugh” at our presumption and ignorance; having already Himself issued His decree that to one or other of us “time shall be no more.”

SERMON XIV.

THE FIVE THOUSAND FED.

MARK vi. 44.

*And they that did eat of the loaves were about
five thousand men.*

IN consequence of the miracles which Jesus had done on them that were diseased, a great multitude followed him to a desert place: and Jesus went up into a mountain—still known it is said, by the designation of the multiplication of bread—and there he sat with his disciples, and the passover was nigh. And Jesus seeing a great company come unto him, said unto Philip, “whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?” and this he said to prove him, to make experiment of his faith; “for he himself knew what he would do.” Philip answered, that two hundred pennyworth of bread was not enough

that every one of them might take a little. Some think that Philip named this sum as being the amount of funds which the disciples had in common;—others, that he mentioned it without such reference, for any large sum. When Philip had said this—the disciples seem not to have thought further of supplying the people's necessities—for the day being far spent, and the place being desert, they advise their Master that the multitude should be dismissed into the villages and towns, and buy themselves provisions. But Jesus answered, “they need not depart, give ye them to eat.” They say unto him shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread and give them to eat? He said unto them, How many loaves have ye? and Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, answered, There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes, but, what are they among so many? Jesus answered, Bring them hither to me; and then said to his disciples, make the men sit down; and they sat down by hundreds and fifties in ranks. And when he had taken the five loaves and the fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and brake; and when he had given thanks he distributed to the disciples

that they should set before the multitude; and they did all eat and were filled; and when they were filled he said to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost; and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments. Then those men which had seen the miracle which Jesus did, said, "This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world." And the next occurrence of which we read, is their attempt to take our Lord by force and make him a king; but "Jesus departed again into a mountain himself alone to pray."

Now here undoubtedly is presented to us such a proof of Christ's Almighty and Creative power that it is scarcely possible to imagine a greater. But is there any reasonable pretext of incredulity? All the Evangelists have recorded this miracle. And when some of the Evangelists' accounts of it were published, the greater portion of this multitude must have been living; and with every temptation to deny it, a denial was never ventured. It was not done in a corner, but in the presence of five thousand men, besides women and children; making in all, we may believe, about eight thousand persons. But was it really done, or were the people deceived by

some artifice? the Scripture saith “that they did all eat and were filled,” and that twelve baskets of fragments remained over and above, after that they all had eaten. But—how would the notion that any deception was practised, agree with the sequel of the narrative, with that account which we have of the *use* which the *multitude* made of it? Immediately after the miracle, the multitude pronounced, “this is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world:” next, in consequence of it, they thought to make our Lord a king; inferring, it is likely, that he who could provide for so many out of such little resources, could also maintain an army, and deliver them from their enemies. And not only this, but we read that on the very next day this same people, in their zeal and admiration, followed our Lord to Capernaum, and took shipping that they might the more expeditiously find him. All this is natural enough on the assumption that the miracle was wrought: but how would it accord with a contrary and opposite belief? The madness of the people is proverbial; but is it yet established as part of their infatuation that they flock to him who in their own belief can do nothing for them? and that they extol to the

skies, and load with honours him who has wilfully, notoriously, and cruelly deceived them?

They who labour to get rid of miracles out of the Sacred history are, at the same time, themselves unconsciously and unwillingly substituting as great, if not greater miracles than any which we are called upon to believe. If, for instance, our Lord did not work miracles, the people on this and many other occasions could not have been moved by their knowledge or experience of them; and they must have acted in opposition to the usual course of human nature without any conceivable motive or object. We can readily understand that, having witnessed such a miracle as the one before us, they should proceed as they did; but that they should proceed as they did without having witnessed a miracle, would be a wonder, equalling, if not surpassing the miracle itself. There is in truth but one way to destroy the belief in Scriptural miracles, and that is by destroying the Word of God itself: so many important results are recorded as having flowed from them, which otherwise would be utterly unaccountable; and narrative and doctrine are so closely and thickly interwoven with them, and dependent on them; that if we expunge the

miracles, and all that is directly and indirectly connected with or consequent upon them, little of the Word of God will remain.

But if the conduct of the *multitude* on this occasion is satisfactory evidence of the truth of the miracle, so also is the use which our Lord himself made of it. We have already heard, that on the next day after this miracle the same people were again assembled before him. On this occasion our Lord himself adverted to this miracle; but in what manner and with what intention? Did he refer to it as any matter which required explanation, or the reality of which he was anxious to impress on them? Did he make any attempt to persuade them of its reality, or did he treat it in any way as a dubious or contestible point? Far from it. Of his own accord he revived the subject, and handled it in precisely the same way as we do any matter of notorious certainty. There was no endeavour to explain or establish; but he reasoned on it, as on premises which none disputed; and which had never been called in question. When he saw the multitude who had followed him, in consequence of this miracle, he said unto them, "Ye seek me,

not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled; labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

Suppose, for a moment, that this miracle had never been wrought—would our Lord, the next day, the very day after his pretensions had been falsified, so soon and of no necessity, have alluded to it in the presence of the same people? or suppose that the miracle had been of questionable certainty, would our Lord thus incidentally have referred to it, and ventured to ground on it not only religious instruction, but even a bold rebuke of the persons whose silence it had been the interest of an impostor to purchase by any arts of conciliation? Yet so it was: our Lord addressing these people on the day after, and knowing that they followed him not from any desire to profit by his heavenly doctrine, but simply because their natural wants had been satisfied, openly reproved them for the same; treating the miracle not as any questionable matter, but as sure grounds on which to proceed—"Ye seek me because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." If our Lord had ventured on such an

appeal to the relief of their wants, would the multitude have tolerated it if their wants had not been relieved? would they tamely have suffered the rebuke, if the premises on which it was built were notoriously fictitious and false? This miracle has evidence enough of its reality to satisfy those who are willing to be determined in religious matters by that testimony which contents in other matters; infinitely more would probably be unavailing where there is a disposition of hostility to the Gospel.

The miracle being free from ingenuous exception, there is much of practical and doctrinal instruction connected with it.

The first remark of a practical character which strikes us, is the slender provision which our Lord and his disciples had. Now the un-earthly and heavenly origin of the Gospel is sufficiently proclaimed by the spirit of indifference which pervades it and its purest followers, in respect of all which the worldly-minded exalt and value above measure and reason. Riches, ease, and luxuries are the appetite of the natural man; but here we behold the Saviour and his family sitting on the ground, the sky for their

canopy, and barley bread and some cold or dried fish for their food, and about six pounds of our money, as the extent of their resources. We should count them wretched who possessed no more; we should reckon them mean-spirited who were satisfied with so little; but the Scripture pronounces them happy who, "setting their affection on things above," have "learned in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content," "eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God."

Secondly,—let us observe our Lord's devotional carriage at this humble repast. When he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven and blessed and gave thanks. In like manner, at his last passover, "when he took the cup he gave thanks," and "when he took the bread he gave thanks;" and after his resurrection, sitting down with the two disciples at Emmaus, "he took bread and blessed it." And the Apostle Paul, in the confusion and peril of shipwreck, would not eat but as a Christian man: "he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all." Such examples suffice to religious minds, and they go not to their meals as a brute beast to

his fodder. The creatures which minister to our nourishment are God's, and ought to be received with thankfulness; whether they shall be for our good or not, depends on the blessing of that providential superintendence which we are commanded to seek by prayer. And, in the language of an eloquent divine, "what part of religion can be better contrived to keep up a constant reverence of God in our minds," and I may add, in our households also, "than this of blessing the table and of giving thanks? what can more habitually humble us with a just sense of our own precarious condition? what more dispose men to use the gifts of God moderately, to entertain them thankfully, to be content with their portion if it be little, to impart of their abundance if it be much, to compassionate those who want the same comforts; to recollect that they are stewards, and that their orders are to give freely of what they have freely received. What, lastly, can be more likely to sanctify, to enlarge and multiply our blessings, than so decent, so public, so devout, so humble a testimony of our great Benefactor's goodness?"—Yet with these manifestly religious properties and uses of the practice

which this divine has pointed out, we have heard of some of the wise and great in this world who do not countenance it, but have laid it aside. Alas! it is easy enough to lay aside a habit of religious acknowledgment; but let us beware lest, renouncing the form we also become insensible to the feeling: it is easy enough to banish prayer and praise, but let us be careful lest by so doing we banish the divine blessing.

A third matter to be noted in this miracle is that, whereas our Lord might equally have manifested his Almighty power by increasing the number of the loaves, he chose rather to make a miraculous division of a few; and this we may believe he did for experiment of the faith; both of those who should distribute and of those who should receive. And it is not the least wonderful circumstance in the history, that none of the Apostles inquired what is there for us to impart? and none of the multitude what is there for us to eat? Oh! if we had faith enough to receive the little which God gives with thankful hearts, and to divide that little as He commands, asking no questions; how often should we prove the truth and solidity

of Solomon's wisdom, "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth;" how often should we know by experience, that better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without godliness and charity? But such faith is rare. Moses had it not, when God having said to him, "I will give the people flesh that they may eat a whole month," he demanded "shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them." Elisha's servitor had it not, when his master commanding him "to set before a hundred men, bread of the first-fruits, twenty small barley loaves and full ears of corn in the husk thereof," he replied, "what should I set this before an hundred men?" But the widow of Sarepta had it when in obedience to the word of Elijah she provided for the man of God before she provided for herself and son; and her barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruise of oil fail, and she, and he, and her house did eat many days. But such faith is rare: a little is not thought enough for ourselves; we take it with murmuring and keep it with niggardness, and fear to cast any just portion of it on the waters in faith and charity; although it

is God that giveth the increase, and there is the Scriptural assurance that we shall find it after many days.

Again, it deserves remark that our Lord did not with his own hands distribute to the multitude, but he gave to his Apostles, and they set before the people. Every action of our Lord's is interesting to a Christian mind; and it is easy to discern some significance in this. He gave to his Apostles that which they were to distribute amongst the people; and the Apostles were to dispense that, and that alone, which had been imparted to themselves. In like manner the ministers of religion are restricted to the delivery of that doctrine, and of that alone, which they have received of the Lord and his Apostles; they are not to preach themselves, or their own wisdom or views. St. Paul saith, "if we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed;" and those words are of fearful application which are found at the close of the Bible, "if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the

words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." By distributing to the Apostles that they might divide amongst the people; the Apostles and their successors, moreover, were reminded that it was an important part of their duty to do good and to communicate. And another purpose closely connected with this was probably contemplated. Our Lord himself was soon to be removed above the reach of men's praise or blame; but his Apostles would remain; and as it would tend to raise them in the public estimation and to reconcile men to their doctrine, if they were made the instruments of his bounty; he preferred the success of his Gospel in their hands to any private and personal respect or honour which might have accrued to himself had he distributed his own charity. If our Lord was moved by this consideration, we may be confident that He who desired that His ministers should be known in the light of benefactors would also have willed (as he himself, in this instance, took care) that they should be provided with the means; and He would not have been a party to any sordid measures by which

the attractiveness and usefulness of the Christian ministry are sought to be destroyed. Ministerial usefulness is eminently promoted where there is a capability of relieving the temporal necessities of our fellow creatures; but this cannot be, where ministers of the Gospel are precluded by a scanty maintenance from walking in the good Samaritan's steps.

Lastly, we may learn, from a circumstance in the detail of this miracle, that, whilst our Lord has set before us an example of bountiful consideration for the needy, he has also laid before us several maxims of prudence to direct us in the same, and which equally merit our attention. He placed before the multitude His whole store of provisions; and this He might well do, whose word or will could create a new abundance: but, then, He also commanded that the fragments should be gathered up that nothing might be lost. And herein 'frugality' is recommended to us in the exercise of charity. If we give all our substance to others, this is a manifest tempting of Divine Providence; and it is contrary to the doctrine of the miracle, which certainly teaches us that some reserve is lawful; that we should 'lay by' a portion

for other charitable occasions, which will not fail to present themselves, and to meet those casualties to which all men are liable. The miracle, moreover, furnishes us with directions as to the parties whom we should prefer for our works of charity. The multitude were in 'a desert,' 'divers of them came from far;' 'they had nothing to eat;' and *they* may be said to be in a desert who are strangers and orphans, and outcasts; and they may be said to have nothing to eat who are friendless and helpless. But as no man is sufficient to the relief of all who are thus distressed in mind, body, or estate; there is another inference from the miracle, which reduces the duty of charity within more practicable bounds. The multitude, fed by the Saviour, were the same who had followed Him; and even the fragments were not left for chance comers, or for the idle and profligate; but were kept as a reserve for those who should come to Him, or were with Him. And hence may we gather, that they should first be selected for our good offices who are followers of Christ, worshipping in the temple and leading virtuous and orderly lives: "the righteous is more excellent than his

neighbour;" and the laws of God, as well as the interests of morals, demand that we put a difference between and shew compassion first on those of our own household of the church of God. And there is another remark which may be suitably introduced in this place. Our Lord, by ordering the fragments to be gathered up that nothing might be lost, unequivocally condemned 'waste;' and He would have called that waste which is consumed on men's lusts, and might be put out to usury in doing good to men's bodies as well as souls. How heavy shall be their account who, born to princely fortunes, have consumed them in riotous living! how, if there is any truth whatever in religion, will they wish to have been born poor and despised who shall be able to render no other account of their stewardship than that much was given them of God for the common good, and they used it all in the service of selfish sin!

I am not aware that any observation of much practical moment and connected with this miracle has not been pointed out. In conclusion, let us advert to the leading doctrines which this miracle exhibits. Our church evidently accounts it of great importance, for she has directed it to

be read several times in the Gospels appointed for the day. The Apostle John thought it of no ordinary character, for this is the only miracle which he has detailed in common with all the other Evangelists. In the eyes of the multitude it was of great moment; for, on witnessing it, they pronounced Jesus to be that prophet which should come into the world, whom Moses foretold as one whom the Lord would raise up like unto himself, but to whom men should hearken in preference to himself; and their next impulse in consequence of it, was to make our Lord a king. These things shew that the first importance has ever been assigned to this miracle. By it Christ manifested that He was possessed of Creative and Almighty power; that He was superior to Moses who, when the people murmured for flesh, could discern no way of deliverance; that He was superior to Elisha who, though he fed an hundred men out of greater, but humanly speaking, insufficient resources, yet wrought not independently, but only according to the Word of the Lord:—this, then, is one ground wherefore the miracle is to be specially noted; it attests Christ's worthiness above the prophets; it proves that He possessed the attribute of Creative power.

But by us who are fully persuaded of Christ's Deity, this evidence of the miracle may be little needed. There is then another use. Christ's feeding a multitude in the Wilderness—does it not clearly prefigure to us the great and spiritual purpose of his heavenly mission? what was this world without Christ's doctrine, but a wilderness in which no good thing dwelt? what are they who are strangers to His doctrine, but those who have nothing to eat to the satisfying of the soul? without a knowledge of the comfortable and saving truths of the Gospel, how meagre is the provision made for man, and especially for them who hunger and thirst after righteousness. In the height of worldly enjoyment, there must have been vanity of vanities inscribed on all that the heart loved and the mind pursued; and how intolerable and reasonless must have seemed the evils of life, before revelation had explained their uses, and how we may convert them into good. “Man does not live by *bread* alone;” that can only minister to the support of a part of the compound man; he has a soul that requires nourishment, strengthening, and refreshing; a mind that soars above the narrow sphere in which he dwells, and all which it contains; a

reason which will not rest in unsubstantiality; a conscience which cries aloud for peace. If we give him all that the world can give, we supply only part of his wants, and those the least important, because they solicit not beyond the range of time. If you would make him happy, you must assure him that there is another and a better world, where that which is pure is incorruptible; and that which is holy is everlasting; "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest:" you must assure him that a way is opened in which, guilty as he is, and sinful as he knows himself to be, if he will only walk, his sins and iniquities shall be no more remembered. This is the spiritual food which the spiritual part of us desires; and without which, there is no happiness which will bear a probe; and this is the bread which hath come down from heaven, and this bread is Christ. The Gospel teaches us that Christ died to save us, that His atonement is accepted, that He rose again for our justification, that His Spirit is poured out for our sanctification, and that "there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" and that "when

Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." This is the food for the soul, which Christ hath brought down from heaven. The fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and they are dead; but if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. Oh ! let us not so labour for those things that perish, and only minister to the support and adorning of the corruptible frame, as to neglect the interests of the soul which never dies. 'Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;' let us feed on it, let our prayer be 'Lord, evermore give us of this bread'—thy word is 'truth,' make us ever to love it and obey it; 'thy word is spirit,' may it quicken us to a lively faith, that we may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works; thy word is 'life,' may we live in it, and continue thine for ever.

SERMON XV.

CHRIST DELIVERED TO HIS OWN PEOPLE.

JOHN XIX. part of verse 6.

Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him.

THE state of destitution in which our Lord was left, in the closing scenes of his eventful history, is little creditable to human nature. On his first apprehension, all the disciples forsook him and fled. Peter and John, indeed, soon recovered from their alarm, so as to follow Jesus, but ‘afar off,’ to the High Priest’s palace; but these were the only exceptions. It might reasonably have been expected that, after the solemn warnings which they had recently received, they would have been better prepared for the event; and we might have looked for greater courage and constancy in those who had but just before, as they all had, professed their

determination to die with their Master rather than deny him. It was written, however, in the word of infallible truth, "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered;" and the cowardice and ingratitude of man proved the Scripture to be given by inspiration of God.

But the charge of desertion does not rest wholly upon the disciples. Is it not reproachful to our race that no one of the multitudes who had been healed by our Lord of various infirmities, stood forth on that occasion in vindication of their Benefactor, to bear witness to the benevolent character of His words and works? The apostle John expressed his belief that "if all the things which Jesus did should be written, every one, even the world itself, could not contain the books which should be written;" and yet there is not on record a single instance that any one of the number, on whom he had had mercy, offered even any show of opposition to the cruel measures of his persecutors, or even came forward with a tender of testimony in his favour.

In both cases, fear of bodily danger appears, along with other causes, to have prevailed over duty and affection. The Apostles were alarmed,

perhaps, lest if they kept close to Christ they should be apprehended and punished as his followers generally; or else seized as accomplices with Peter, in that act of violence of which he had been guilty in striking off Malchus's ear; and others were probably deterred by the circumstance that a certain young man (supposed, by some, to have been the apostle John) who had, in the first instance, followed Christ; was straightway laid hold of by the soldiers, and with difficulty escaped with the loss of a portion of his dress. ✓

Thus deserted by His disciples, and the multitudes on whom He had conferred his wonderful mercies, Christ stood before Caiaphas. The great object desired and sought by the chief priests and elders and the council, was sufficient testimony on which they might put Jesus to death. Many false witnesses rose up and laid to his "charge things which he knew not," but their witness agreed not together. At the last came two false witnesses, saying, 'this fellow said,' 'we heard him say,' "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands:" but neither so did their witness agree. As our

Lord had on a certain occasion, about three years before, delivered himself in words to this effect; speaking figuratively of the temple of His body, which, being destroyed, should by His own power be restored to life; it is not self-evident wherein the disagreement of these last witnesses consisted. It may have been that the witnesses differed as to the time or place, when and where these words were uttered; or in their version of them, or in their application of them. In some way they agreed not, and the chief priests and elders were obliged to a different proceeding. Had these witnesses agreed in proving that Christ had spoken against the temple; it is extremely probable that the Jews would have condemned Christ to death upon this single charge, for any prophecy against the temple was considered blasphemous, and blasphemy was a capital offence. Failing, however, in this attempt—for the evidence was so conflicting, or otherwise contemptible, that our Lord deigned not to answer the accusation brought against him—the Jews altered their course, and instead of searching for further evidence in this matter, after the trouble which they had already taken and in vain; they proceeded to question

Jesus himself, as to His pretensions, by the mouth of their High Priest. “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus saith unto him ‘thou hast said,’ ‘I am.’ Having made this declaration, he was at once pronounced guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death.

But now it would seem for the first time to have struck these chief priests and elders, that the imputation of blasphemy which they had been at so much pains to establish would not answer their purpose; for they themselves, if according to some they possessed the power of capital execution, durst not use it on the *feast* day; and the Romans, who cared nothing about the God of the Jews, would not for blasphemy against Him have delivered Christ to be crucified. To compass their object, therefore, the *immediate* execution of Christ—for, from several passages in the Gospels, it would seem that they were afraid to keep him in prison for a few days lest the people should attempt a rescue—they took our Lord straightway to Pilate, the Roman governor, and there accused him of another and a very different offence, and one of which they well knew the earliest cognizance would be taken;

namely, sedition. They led Him unto Pilate, and said, “We found this fellow perverting the nation,¹ and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” Pilate entertained the charge, but, after due examination, acquitted him, saying, “I find no fault in him;” and, being unwilling to take part in His condemnation, seized the first pretext for sending him to Herod, ‘who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time,’ and to whose jurisdiction our Lord, as a Galilean, more properly belonged. Herod, although he was at variance with Pilate, and, we may believe, well disposed to act in opposition to him, sent back our Lord to Pilate with precisely the same verdict, “I can find no fault in him.” Upon this, Pilate renewed his attempts to release our Lord; until at length being wrought upon by threats, that if he did not put Jesus to death, they would accuse him to the jealous and cruel Tiberius, as being no friend to his government, and remiss in the suppression of sedition; he delivered our Lord to death. “When he saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of

this just person; see ye to it.” “Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him.”

These particulars in our Lord’s narrative are of considerable interest, shewing us that our blessed Redeemer was put to death by a base and malignant faction, in opposition to his judge’s sentence, and in the absence of any charge which could be supported.

It was not, however, for the purpose of insisting on these points that I entered on the detail. The observation with which we commenced was, that Christ, at this eventful period was altogether deserted by his friends: that after his apprehension, none of his disciples, and none of those who had been healed, came to his succour, even in the way of counteracting that false testimony which was so eagerly sought, and for which of course every encouragement was held out. If this was highly discreditable to our race, how wonderful is the fact, that, in the absence of any friends to watch the proceedings and confront his adversaries, and our Lord, humanly speaking, being at the mercy of his bitterest persecutors; not even a pretence of justice could be supported against Him. How uniform and irresistible, as well

as spotless, must have been that life and conversation which could bear such a prejudicial scrutiny—stand alone and triumph over the malice of men backed by the powers of hell!

And what shall we say of the witnesses? how was it that they did not league together and dress up a specious and consistent falsehood, that should be taken for truth by those who were anxious to be misled, and who would gladly have received as truth whatever could further their purpose, if only a fair appearance could by any means have been maintained? We are obliged, I think, to confess the finger of God in this; to say that He who taketh the wise in their own craftiness made the malice of man to praise Him; that He who suffered not Balaam to speak as he chose, against his elect people, for the wages of iniquity, in this instance also exercised some mysterious influence over the minds or tongues of those who would have done his Prophet harm by false accusation; so that they spake not what they meant, or agreed not in what they spake. Had false witnesses agreed in what they said, and had Christ suffered in consequence of their consentient testimony; his sentence would have

been legalized according to the Jewish law, in which it was written, “at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the matter be established;” and unbelief would in all ages have profited by the circumstance; and believers would have been left under the disadvantage of their evidence, which might have been hard to disprove. But how forcibly and easily is Christ’s innocence established by the way which Providence preferred. Christ’s character is vindicated—not by the Apostles only, who might be suspected of partiality; not by those who, having shared in his merciful doings, might have been supposed, through gratitude, to have witholden or disguised much that had come to their knowledge; but His worthiness is attested by those witnesses against him who were condemned out of their own mouths, and rejected as unworthy of credit by their own employers; and not by these only, but by Herod, who, although “with his men of war he had set him at nought and mocked him,” could find no fault in Him;—by Pilate, who washed his hands in testimony that he was innocent of his blood;—and subsequently, by Judas, who, possessing the opportunities of a friend, and

the dispositions of an enemy, freely declared that he had sinned in betraying the innocent blood.

This is one considerable use which we may make of these proceedings on the part of our Lord's enemies. For the purpose of practical instruction, two observations are suggested by those words of Pilate which are placed at the head of this discourse, and were delivered on the occasion which we have been considering; and most deserving they are of serious thought: if they be condemnatory of many, in this Christian land; let us hope that they may minister to the improvement of some.

Pilate said to the Chief Priests and others, "Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him." The first observation is that Pilate, a heathen, scrupled to do what the elect people of God would do without compunction; and the second is, that he left Christ to be crucified by his own people.

The first observation is that Pilate, a heathen, scrupled to do, what a Jew would do without remorse. I mean not to eulogise heathen morality; it was wofully bad in practice, and defective in principle; but still that which is

written, is written, and written too for our learning; and it is written that a heathen hesitated at what a Jew was eager to commit. May we not, with a little alteration and extension of terms, say that many of the Gentile world would have scruples of conscience where Christians have none; that the practice of many of the Gentiles would shame and condemn many who are called Christians? Are there not vices amongst us which an heathen would repudiate? Do we not indulge in habits of omission and commission with which many of the heathen would fear to be charged? We read in books that it is the practice of certain of the heathen to look out expectingly from the hills that they may catch the first glimpse of that bright luminary which they ignorantly worship, and pay to it their earliest devotions: is it not the practice of many, Christians by name, to rise day by day without even a passing sentiment of duty and gratitude to that mysterious but benevolent God "in whom we live and move and have our being." We learn from heathen writings that it was their custom, on the eve of any great undertaking, to invoke the aid and auspices of their divinities: is it not the habit

of many of us, the more enlightened, to enter on works of the first moment to our country, ourselves, and others, without any religious preparation, or supplication of blessing and aid from on high? We read of certain others, that their reverence for that which they account their sacred volume, amounts even to superstition: is the Bible, the word of eternal life, held in just respect by us? are there not Christian families, abounding in wealth and luxuries, in which it is seldom or never opened to be read and pondered? Heathen sincerity of attachment to their foolish and cruel creeds is attested by the voluntary surrender of fortune and life: how often does Christian zeal grow cold, if a little sacrifice of ease and means be required? Are there not to be found in Christian families that undutifulness and ingratitude to parents which would be thought disgraceful in a heathen dwelling, and which even heathen would visit with severity of condemnation? Is there not amongst us a wanton use of that fearful name which even a pagan would not pronounce without reverential obeisance? Are there not amongst us various kinds of licentiousness, which a heathen would be ashamed to avow, much more to per-

petrate in open day? If we compare our land with heathen countries, without doubt we are highly distinguished above them in respect of the general morals; but if we examine the condition of particular families and individuals, much shall be seen in common practice amongst us which a heathen would condemn and eschew; and if a religious heathen would condemn, what must be the judgment of the righteous God?

The second observation founded on our text is, that Pilate left Christ to be crucified by his own people. By this it is not meant literally that the Jews crucified our Lord. Crucifixion was a Roman punishment, and executed by Roman soldiers; but the sense is that Pilate delivered our Lord to the will of the Jews, and suffered the execution of that sentence which they, and not he desired. "Take ye him and crucify him." This was directly addressed to the Jews, with whom nearly the whole guilt of Christ's crucifixion rests. But the words seem to have a sort of prophetic significance, and to intimate that then and ever the chief enemies of Christ should be of the number of his own people. This sense is, at least, supported by fact; for, let me ask, who were and

who are the worst enemies of Christ? Persecution has done its utmost to crush His religion; but we cannot account it Christ's greatest enemy, for the blood of martyrs became the seed of the Church; and that rage and madness which dispersed Christians, spread Christianity farther and wider. The heathen cannot be reckoned Christ's chief enemies, for they would not have put Him to death; and they gladly accepted His salvation when "his own received him not;" and now, wherever His Gospel is preached, commending itself to their consciences, it is readily embraced, and manifests itself in a suitable reformation of manners. So neither can avowed infidels be regarded as his worst enemies: for, in the first place, they are few in number and powerless; and, secondly, although hating Christ with a perfect hatred, they have unwillingly and unwittingly essentially promoted his cause by that contrast to the pure doctrines and practices of the Gospel which they have exhibited in their lives and teaching, and by the mighty phalanx of defenders which their hostile endeavours have called into the field of controversy. Who, then, are the greatest enemies of Christ? The

prophet Micah saith, “a man’s enemies are the men of his own house;” and we fear that in this case it is so. Judas was one of the worst enemies which Christ ever had; one of his own house, affecting to be a disciple, and yet betraying the interests of his Master with a kiss of friendship. And he seems to be the head of a class of men, many in number; and who, in truth, are greater enemies to Christ than infidels, or heathen, or persecutors. Who can calculate the mischief which nominal professors work to the cause of our holy religion? Their apathy acts as a restraint on the exertions of the zealous; their evil example gains admission, and bears influence where the openly profane would be excluded; their insincerity causes that a stigma is affixed on the really conscientious; their tempers and vices are imputed, by the less considerate, to the system which they profess, instead of being ascribed to the abuse of it; their disregard of Christ’s precepts and institutions is used as an argument of the unimportance of His doctrine and ordinances: and thus the practice of His religion falls more and more into decay. It is impossible, however, to detail all the mischief which

they do. We may form some estimate of its amount, if we take the Gospel into our hands and compare the present state of this Christian land with what it would be if all who say that they believe in Christ walked consistently with their holy vocation. If a vastly different state of things prevails, it is because of nominal disciples.

Have we not, then, reason to say that Pilate's words, 'Take ye him and crucify him,' apply to them? Do they not crucify Him afresh, putting Him to open shame by thus denying the Lord that bought them; by thus dishonouring His pure and undefiled religion, in the face of the world,—and preventing it from having its full sway and glory? Oh, how bitterly did our Lord himself complain of them: "why call ye me Lord, Lord, if ye do not the things which I say,"—why have ye not the candour, the propriety to call yourselves after his name, whose servants ye really are? If the world, or its fashions; if lust or gold, is your master—why not deal tenderly with my reputation, and confess yourselves his servants to whom ye obey? Is it not enough that I, the Just, once suffered for the unjust; must man's injustice be still my

portion? now that I am raised to glory, above the reach of my enemies, must I yet be wounded by the treason of friends? Thus, with all reverence, may we suppose the Saviour to expostulate with those who call him 'Lord,' and virtually will not that He should reign over them. But, where are these nominal professors to be found? are they few in number, hidden in the corners of the land and rarely to be met with? Alas! even in our churches, at our altars, and on their knees, there are those who call 'Christ, Lord and Saviour,' but whose uncharitableness, unchristian lives, and wicked tempers, show that they are none of His. If we run to and fro in the streets, there we are met by blasphemers, drunkards, and the openly vicious: but these, we say in pity, are poor and foolish; they are ignorant, and have been nurtured in want and infamy, and know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God: if then we get us unto the great men, and speak unto them, for they must know the way of the Lord, having received the advantages of education and possessing all means of informing themselves, and leisure as well as abilities for examining and judging: there again, alas! we meet with Sab-

bath-breakers in multitudes, unjust, adulterers, swearers; with fashions which set at nought the undoubted will of God; with tempers most unchristian—pride, envy, revenge; with habits of irreligion, with lukewarmness in the service of God and Christ. Oh! if the ministers of religion speak boldly, it is because it is their duty; and because their vocation reminds them more solemnly than others are warned of the immense importance of promptly discharging it. We are called upon to visit the dying—youth cut off in the midst of hope—and age in helplessness,—we hear men's complaints of misspent time; their confession of errors that can never be amended; their sorrow for the past; their fears in regard of the future. Some we rejoice to know are spared to a godly repentance; but many are taken away, but not, alas! from the evil to come. How, then, can we forbear saying to the living, “O ye congregations, are your minds set upon righteousness?” The same God which shall judge the heathen shall judge the Christian, and by the same rule, ‘Whether they have walked according to the light vouchsafed?’ ‘Where much has been given, much shall be required;’ the most has been given to us. Are we then

sincere followers of Jesus Christ? or are we passing to the eternal world in the habitual practice of a flattering but fatal deception; calling ourselves Christian, and yet holding private views of our own which are not Christian; and there being nothing in respect of morals to distinguish us above, perhaps somewhat to degrade us below, the heathen. There cannot be hypocrisy before God. The darkness and the light are both alike to him. No disguise of character, no profession of belief, can possibly deceive Him. Such as in our consciences we know ourselves to be, such we are in His sight. We cannot even seem to be before Him, that which we are not. Is it, then, the testimony of our consciences that we are indeed believers in Jesus Christ; that we trust in His atonement and mediation, and not in any poor worthiness of our own, for our final acceptance with God? And, this being the nature of our faith, is it the testimony of our consciences that the religion of Christ is the controller of our households, the dispenser of our fortunes, the director of our views and affections, the corrector of our dispositions? or have we, in very truth, any other Master, whom we love better and serve first? Do we delight in

prayer and worship? do we *worthily* partake of the Lord's Supper? perhaps some one present has never yet communicated of the Lord's body and blood; and yet he calls Christ, 'Lord;' and this was almost His expiring command, "Do this in remembrance of me." Alas! how many will say to these plain, but everlastingly important questions, "Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for you;" but whether men will hear or forbear, we dare not trifle with our fellow-creatures. If religion is anything, it must be immensely above all things important: if the name of discipleship could save us, Judas was a disciple.

SERMON XVI.

IS IT I?

MARK xiv. 19.

And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him, one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

THE circumstances which gave occasion to this enquiry, must be familiar to every reader of the Christian Scriptures. On the evening preceding His suffering, our Lord sat down in company with the Twelve, at the institution of the Eucharist: and being troubled in spirit, He said unto them, “Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” This declaration was novel, astounding, and distressing. Our Lord had, indeed, some time previously intimated that one of the number of the Apostles would be distinguished from the rest by some work of malice: “have I not chosen you twelve,

and one of you is a devil;" and, more recently, "ye are clean, but not all;" but, when it was plainly said to them that one of them should advance to the iniquity of betraying their Lord and Master, they were slow to believe it of themselves, and much slower to impute it to another. They began to enquire amongst themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing, and "they began to be exceeding sorrowful; and every one of them to enquire, Lord, is it I?" and "they looked on one another, doubting of whom he spake." At length, Simon Peter, with his characteristic impatience, beckoned to John, who was leaning on Jesus's bosom, that he should ask "who it should be of whom he spake?" Our Lord answered, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot. Then Judas answered and said, "Master, is it I? He said unto him, thou hast said." It is to be noted, for the sake of the reflection to which it gives rise, that Judas when he asked this question, had already covenanted with the chief priests to betray His blessed Master; and that he was now seeking opportunity that he might conveniently betray Him.

These particulars suffice for the simple purpose which I intend, namely, that of remarking on the humility, the charitable character, and the importance of the question proposed by the Twelve.

First, let us remark on the humility of this enquiry. Our Lord knew whom he had chosen, but the case before us shews that they who were chosen considered themselves as men liable to wickedness of the deepest dye, even to that of betraying their beloved Master and friend. Not one of them, not even Peter, ventured on a bold denial, and said, "it is not I," "it cannot be I," "it is not possible that I should do it;" "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I can never betray thee." No language of this sort escaped from the lips of even the most confident amongst them; and they virtually admitted by the question which they put, that they considered this the greatest of wickedness possible; that is, that it was not beyond the power of their commission. Yet the Apostles, with one exception, were holy men; they had given strong proofs of their moral courage, "having forsaken all to follow Jesus;" they were affectionate, strongly attached

to their Master; they were bold, prepared to draw the sword in His behalf; and the peculiar failing of at least one was an undue confidence in his integrity. From these virtues, characters, temperaments, we might have expected a prompt and absolute rejection of the imputation, and a denial of the possibility: yet no one of them ventured to give it, but each for himself enquired, “Is it I?”

All Scripture was given for our learning, and neither last nor least this portion of it. It instructs us that, whatever may have been the tenor of our lives, whatever proofs we may already have given of our sincerity and integrity; and whatever confidence the past may inspire with respect to the future, so long as the infirmity of human nature is our inheritance, and powerful temptation besets from within and from without; we should not count ourselves out of the reach even of that iniquity, the very thought of which at present painfully distresses us. There may be flourishing in us, our hearts or habits, some evil waiting only for time, and the skilful application of temptation—which the enemy of souls knows when and how to apply,—and that which we may have

admired as the fair temple of virtue shall be shaken and rent, and exhibit the worst deformities of vice. Many are virtuous in the face of temptation; many, in the absence of it; neither should glory: he that has withstood much, must not, therefore, presume that he shall certainly withstand all; he that is untried, may prove unequal to the trial.

These thoughts are humbling, but then this is their use; and a reason wherefore we perpetually urge them. Yet some, perhaps, will despise them. Unlike the Apostles, they account it a thing impossible that they should ever be guilty of heinous transgression; and they are prepared to ask with Hazael of old—when Elisha, with tears, warned him of the enormities which he would commit—“is thy servant a dog that he should do this?” But Hazael, it should be remembered, did all and more than all which the Prophet foretold, and to which he himself had listened with wrathful incredulity: and so have others. By neglecting a diligent, constant, and religious watching of themselves, they let in habits of practice, and cultivated dispositions, without a thought whither they would lead them, if they were left unmo-

lested. By presuming on their principles, without enquiry into their foundation, and hedging them round with the constant helps of religion; they became in the hour of trial as reeds before the wind. To tell a man, at present firm in the faith of Christ, that it is possible for him to reject the Saviour, and renounce altogether the hope that is in him; this might be considered by him language even beyond the licence of a supposition; yet in some cases, the possibility, if enquired into, would be found to amount to a reasonable degree of probability. Whilst believing themselves firm in the faith, and immoveable; relying on their strength, they are, perhaps, canvassing every infidel opinion, and insensibly imbibing a poison which shall, at the last, infect the whole soul; or, being of a speculative turn, they are explaining the facts or miracles of Scripture, to their greater satisfaction, perhaps, but yet so as ultimately to subvert most important doctrines, which rest on those facts; or, being called by their pursuits to the demonstrative sciences, they are insensibly cultivating a spirit which shall demand the same sort of evidence in the things of God, and cause them to distrust or repudiate whatever

claims their belief without it. In these ways, which many little suspect, it is evidently possible for a believer to become the very opposite character of that which he thinks himself capable of becoming. And if such deadly mischiefs to the faith may result, where they are the least contemplated, and by means not absolutely criminal; history, unhappily, abounds with too many examples to allow us to ask the question, whether the same or like evils may be produced by any acknowledged and predominant vice. It is frequently forced upon us, what melancholy changes in character are effected by a wandering from the truth, the love of money, or the indulgence of angry, jealous, or envious feelings! And the design of mentioning this, is not to establish a fact which is obvious to the observer of daily events, but to inculcate humility in thinking and judging of ourselves; to enforce watchfulness, and a constant examination of ourselves; that we may know our real state, the evil to which we are most prone, and by which we are most likely to be led; and to urge the infinite importance of arming our principles with some stronger and more perfect armour than that of our own strength

and resolutions. Many who in these or other ways have exhibited such deplorable changes, have confessed that they first relaxed in some important point of religious duty or discipline; that they were negligent of prayer, careless of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or of public worship, or of self-examination; or else that they had been previously governed by the opinion of the world, by a regard for friends, by the practice of society; all weak and variable motives, and unable to abide the gust of violent temptation. If we would defend ourselves against the evils which they brought on themselves, we must beware of their errors, and clothe ourselves in humility of mind and spirit; judging of ourselves that, left to ourselves, we are exposed to all to which others have been exposed; to the power of all the evils by which others have been seduced; and that our only security consists in a constant application of those lights to our blindness, and helps to our weakness, which God, in his love for souls, hath vouchsafed in His word and by His grace.

Thus much on the humility exhibited in the Apostle's question, 'Is it I?' Let us next remark on the charitable form in which it was

put. Peter did not ask, if it was Thomas who should do this? nor did Thomas ask, if it was Judas? They were indeed suspicious; but, then, each suspected himself. And we may take occasion from this feature in the account to observe, first, that whilst there is much sin and uncharitableness in suspecting others without sufficient grounds; there is some wisdom in occasionally entertaining, it may be, a wanton suspicion of ourselves. If we never give way to any such misgivings, but trust implicitly and without enquiry to the fair appearance which we manage to maintain; as this appearance may be greatly owing not to any soundness or strength of principle, but to the circumstances in which we are placed; our whole economy is, of course, liable to be disturbed and overturned by any change in them. There are unquestionably many whose characters are built, little, if at all, on religious principle, but just formed by circumstances; and we may be of the number: so that, if we heartily desire to preserve our integrity to the end, and under all events which may happen, and also to be really acquainted with ourselves, it will be far from an unwise course occasionally to indulge

in suspicions respecting our own characters. The rich man looks with peculiar abhorrence on fraud and dishonesty; they are crimes which he believes it is utterly impossible for him to perpetrate; but it will not do him mischief if he yield to the suspicion of the possibility of his guilt in this way. This will lead to enquiry, and sometimes to the discovery that his abomination of these crimes springs from the condition in which he is placed, and not from any fear of God and principled love of virtue: it might lead to the discovery that he is possessed of that idleness, and that want of control over his desires, which, if his circumstances should change, and he should be tempted by poverty, would lead him easily to those very transgressions which he so vehemently condemns; it might lead to the discovery, in short, that all the seeds of dishonesty are now in him, and only waiting for occasion, and they would put forth their fruit. In like manner, one of humble means may regard, with peculiar complacency, his abstinence from the vices of the great; but if he admitted for a time the suspicion that he is capable of them, he might often learn that that which he regards as virtue is nothing more or

other than the want of opportunity and ability for sinful gratification. In both cases, the parties enquiring would probably be led to certain conclusions which could not be otherwise than serviceable to them if they consult their steadfastness throughout life; and are also persuaded that a course of religious principle is the only one acceptable to God.

But, again, by the Apostles turning their suspicions on themselves and not upon others, we are taught the duty of charitable forbearance towards our neighbour: and certainly, no lesson demands a more constant enforcement. Both in public and private, the too common practice is to busy ourselves with our neighbours' faults, or with suspicions of what they may be capable of committing. Judging by what we hear and witness, we might easily glide into the imagination that almost every one considered himself his brother's keeper, and responsible for his morals and conduct; although it would be hard, indeed, to persuade ourselves that there was a brotherly concern for his welfare, considering the tone of triumph, and the reckless want of allowance with which a neighbour's errors are frequently canvassed and published. And this

disposition unhappily is not laid aside, even when we enter the temple, where *every* evil propensity ought to be held in close keeping, but more especially one which is so obviously at variance with a religion of love. The preacher selects a subject for the good of all; he trusts it to the grace of God and to every man's conscience, that it may bring forth fruit; without presuming to limit its application to any individual in particular; and this is commonly allowed to his praise: but how many of those who would be loud in their censure, if the *preacher* overstepped this modesty and prudence, are themselves at the same time actively engaged in applying his reproof or condemnation to any but themselves. How frequent are the observations 'this was meant for such an one;' 'such an one ought to have heard this:' and how frequently, too, are these remarks put forth by those very persons to whom themselves the discourse was especially suited, and to whom above others it might be considered as directly and purposely addressed. Many are ready with their exclamation 'thou art the man;' few are wisely and charitably employed in the enquiry, 'Is it I?' And yet, in the language of

an Apostle, “ Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master, he standeth or falleth.” Every one of us must give account of himself, not of his neighbour, to God, and we may well exclude from our anxiety that which shall find no place for good or for bad in our final reckoning. We shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; and we shall not be pronounced wise in proportion to other men’s folly, nor good in proportion to other men’s guilt.

The third matter which was marked out for observation in treating of the question before us, is the exceeding importance that we frequently apply it, and seek an answer, where alone it can be satisfactorily obtained. This part of my subject however has been so greatly anticipated, that I shall add but little to what has been already offered. If we never ask, ‘ is it I ’ that can do this? am I sufficiently fortified against this temptation? am I proof against this wickedness? if we never enquire into the nature of our principles, their strength and dependences, and the care which we are taking to confirm them; some evil lurking in us, and meeting with time and temptation, may suddenly

break forth in triumph; and then when in shame and confusion we ask, "is it I that could do this?" at the same time the overwhelming confession shall be made. It has been so with numbers — proceeding quietly, complacently, never examining themselves, their weak and unguarded points, their strong propensities, their silent habits; insensible to danger, and negligent of those things wherein our strength consists; they were ignorant of the wickedness of which they were capable before they found themselves entangled in its labyrinths of guilt. And others more wretched have passed in like manner through their day of probation, and their knowledge of their real character is reserved for that fearful revelation when the things which they have done, and the manner of persons which they were, shall be set in order before them.

I have now remarked on the humility, and the charitable character and the importance of the enquiry, 'Is it I?' and if this discourse is not to be added to the number of those which shall rise up in condemnation at the last; we shall endeavour to improve by what we have heard. We shall learn to think humbly and modestly

of ourselves, and to practise a charitable forbearance towards our neighbours. Above all, seeing the mischiefs and the misery which result from an ignorance of ourselves, our weaknesses, and capabilities of sinning, we shall be frequent in the application of the question "Is it I?" When we read in the public records the dreadful excesses brought about by one ungoverned passion, one vicious indulgence; we shall not dismiss the narrative in haste, as if it altogether concerned some one else, or a different class of beings, and could by no possibility belong to us; but shall frequently enquire, "is it possible that *my* story may be here written, with a few and perhaps unimportant exceptions or alterations? I am not a drunkard; and the probability is therefore little, that, bereft of my self-command by the fumes of intoxication, I shall ever be maddened to the commission of deeds of blood; but, perhaps, if I am not this, I am intemperate in my passion, hasty and reckless in my wrath, and may yet do some deadly work even to those whom I tenderly love." "I am not tempted by poverty, and it is not likely that I shall ever from this cause advance to works

of violence and robbery; yet, perhaps, I am covetous, greedy of gain, and my secret injustices may be many and grievous." When we mix in society and witness the indignation with which certain characters are justly or unjustly treated; and are prepared to join in the general condemnation; often shall we pause, retire into ourselves, and ask, whether condemning others we have been condemning ourselves; whether the only difference between us and them is, that their wickedness of disposition has broken forth, and ours is waiting opportunity; that they are discovered and we are still in disguise; or whether, if their sin is not ours, ours is as hateful as theirs? When we read the Scriptures, or hear them read, we shall frequently halt and make individual application of that general language which many pass by without heeding, as if that which was commanded or threatened to *all* did not most closely concern each. Nay, the declaration more immediately under our notice, will not be allowed to pass by us as altogether a history of the past, and in which those of the present day have not an everlasting interest: "Verily I say unto you, one of you shall betray me." We cannot do as Judas

did, deliver our Lord into the hands of His enemies for filthy gain; but we can in our hearts and by our lives deny the Lord that bought us; we can give occasion to His enemies to triumph; we can render abortive, in our own cases at least, His gracious work of redemption. This is still in our power; and earnest ought to be the enquiry of every one of us, “am I doing this great wickedness, and sinning so mortally against God my Redeemer, and my own soul?”

This is the nature of the enquiry suggested by our text; and if we have a sincere regard for the welfare of our souls, we shall certainly often apply the question before us, and put it deliberately; and not be hasty in judging, nor satisfied with the verdict of every judge. We need not ask it of our enemies, for they, perhaps, are indifferent to our well-being; yet often will an enemy do us that service from which friends would shrink, and bring to light and admonish us of some evil which is secretly working our spiritual ruin. We shall hardly be content with the sentence of friends; for they are notoriously partial in their judgment. But let us ask of our consciences and our hearts;

and as these are deceitful, let us frame the enquiry after the Apostle's model, "*Lord, is it I?*" Let us appeal to the God who made us, who knoweth whereof we are made, and 'what is in man:' and in the diligent study of His word and comparison of ourselves according to it; in prayer for His Spirit to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, to reprove, comfort, and encourage, as needs may be; in these we shall obtain an answer in which we may confide: and if we heartily endeavour to fashion our ways according to it, we shall not be afraid of that fearful revelation, which shall be the ruin of thousands who passed their days without thought, and in a blind confidence in a fancied righteousness; namely, the knowledge of *ourselves*.

Such is our advice, and the encouragement which we hold forth; but some, we fear, will remain unaffected by the one and the other. They are satisfied with themselves, or are afraid of this examination by reason of the disclosures to which it would probably lead. To each I would address a word or so in concluding. To those who are satisfied with themselves, and on this ground reject the exhortation to this self-

examination, I would say, let them only look, for instance, at the traitor Judas. He had already bargained for blood, yet he took his seat at the solemn feast of the Lord's Supper. He evinced no symptom of guilt, betrayed and perhaps felt no remorse, but joined in the Apostle's eager enquiry, as if he were ignorant of any evil design; and perhaps—as the Evangelist mentions him separately—he repeated the question oftener and more earnestly than the others. Let them look at this picture, and see what hypocrisy can dare! what a bold front she can put forth; what complacency she can maintain in the indulgence of heavy guilt, and even on the very eve of detection; and with this picture before them, let them ask themselves, Whether, if they do not give themselves to reflection, the mask which Judas wore may not be more or less common to them? They may be satisfied with themselves because their repute is fair, so was Judas's in mortal eyes: because they are not suspected, so neither was Judas, perhaps, at this time by his brethren; because they feel no compunction, so neither apparently did Judas; because they come to church and say their prayers, Judas could

even sit down with the Redeemer in bodily presence, and in all the familiarity of discipleship! Oh, let not any rest in his satisfaction with himself, unless he has anxiously enquired whether it will bear probing by the Word of God and by the Searcher of hearts. The course with the hypocrite is that he begins by deceiving others; and ends with deceiving himself, and believing himself to be that which he has endeavoured to persuade others that he is; and thus does he often pass to the grave, leaving it to the day of judgment to make known to himself what manner of man he was.

And to those who fear the entertainment of this enquiry, lest its disclosures should impair their present peace, bring their guilt to light, and fill them with alarm,—we would say that whatever disclosures might be effected, these must certainly take place when all secrets shall be made manifest; and if they would be painful now, they shall not be less intolerable when the way of escape from condemnation has passed and for ever. But our object in urging this enquiry is not that men by learning the truth may be driven to desperation, as Judas finally was; nor yet that their guilt may so prey on

their minds as to destroy even present happiness; but we would have them know themselves, that this knowledge may not hereafter be their overwhelming; and that, being acquainted with their weaknesses and special liabilities to sin, they may see where strength is most wanted, and be moved to seek it earnestly from above. We would have them find out their sins, that they may break them off by righteousness, and ease their consciences of a burden which shall weigh down many a soul into the abyss of torment. We would have them seek, and seek diligently until they find, that peace which alone deserves the name; the satisfaction of a conscience tried by the Word of God, the spirit of the Gospel, and exercised in all goodness; and to which, notwithstanding its many and grievous accusations, that Word of God proclaims pardon and peace through the atonement and mediation of our Redeemer.

SERMON XVII.

SUCH AN ONE AS PAUL THE AGED.

St. PAUL's Epistle to PHILEMON, part of verse 9.

Such an one as Paul the aged.

THERE is somewhat affecting in the circumstances with which this passage is connected. The Philemon to whom the Epistle was addressed, was a person of some consideration, both for his wealth and his station in the church. He had been converted to the Christian faith, either under the personal ministry of St. Paul, or through the instrumentality of some whom the Apostle had sent to preach the Gospel at Colossœ. St. Paul alludes to this in the nineteenth verse, “albeit I do not say to thee, how thou owest unto me even thine own self.” Now this Philemon had a slave, Onesimus by name, who, it would seem, robbed his master, and ran away

and escaped to Rome, where St. Paul was, during his first imprisonment in that city. By some means, he was introduced to the society of the Apostle, and by him was converted and baptized: and, being sensible of his past misconduct, he was desirous to return to his master; but, at the same time, afraid lest he should be punished according to the laws of the country. Under these circumstances, St. Paul, assured of his penitence and change of character, wrote to Philemon, requesting him to forgive him, and receive him again into his family. The Apostle used much persuasiveness. He wrote the letter ‘with his own hand,’ which was not usual with him; and sent it by Onesimus himself, that Philemon might not doubt of his desire to be restored to him. The letter itself is justly admired; not only for sentiment and feeling, but also for its courtesy, and the delicacy with which the Apostle urges his suit. It commences with expressions of the sincerest affection to Philemon; and having in this way warmed the heart of Philemon, the Apostle proceeds to the immediate purpose of his writing. He pleads for Onesimus as a son, ‘begotten in his bonds,’ meaning a convert, whom he had made during

his imprisonment. He does not conceal or extenuate Onesimus's fault, but hints that, since it led to his conversion, the hand of Providence would seem to have been concerned in the matter. He professes that such was his conviction of Onesimus's conversion, that he himself would willingly have retained him in his service, if he had had Philemon's permission. He offers to make restitution for the wrong which Onesimus had done; he gently touches on Philemon's obligations to himself: and whilst he reminds him that as an Apostle, he had authority to enjoin him to receive Onesimus, "not as a servant, but above a servant, as a brother beloved"—yet would he rather 'for love's sake beseech him,' being "such an one as Paul the aged, and also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."

These words, "such an one as Paul the aged," must have been full of significance to Philemon's mind. Whilst they must have brought to his recollection the essential service which the Apostle had rendered him, and admonished him of the respect and obedience due to the aged; they must have reminded him of the wrongs which Paul had suffered and was suffering: and how, thinking of these, could he

entertain a thought of his own? they must have called up the remembrance of Paul's long and zealous labours for the good of souls—and how could he reject a penitent brother? they must have warned him that the time was at hand when his friend and teacher should be parted from him; and how should he not, while he had opportunity, forgive Onesimus for *his* sake who had been the instrument whereby so much had been forgiven to him? and, altogether, he must have been deeply affected that one, so high in character and in station in the Church, and venerable in years, was not in circumstances to prefer his request otherwise than “as Paul the aged, and also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.”

These, and, most likely, other and weighty significances were attached to the words, in Philemon's apprehension, and they all tended to the furtherance of the Apostle's object, and, we may believe, succeeded in effecting it. To any one acquainted with the Apostle's history, and especially to a Christian mind, the same words are replete with meaning; and, as it cannot be uninteresting, so may it be useful, to consider their various implications, both of

the lowest and highest character. Let us then apply ourselves to the unfolding of them, in the hope that, if no new knowledge be imparted, yet an ardent desire may be excited in us to walk in the Apostle's steps; if not in all points, which is neither possible nor desirable, yet in those matters which are of everlasting concern.

First—let us look at the lowest, or only temporal implications of the words of our text. “Such an one as Paul the aged” implies such an one as he himself had been in respect of early advantages, those of birth and education. And here if it were allowed any man to boast, St. Paul had much occasion of glory. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a descendant of the patriarch Abraham, without admixture of Gentile blood; of the tribe of Benjamin; a native of Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia, and of such eminent rank in philosophy and literature, that it was said to excel even Athens and Alexandria; he was moreover a citizen of Rome, an honour derived from some of his ancestors, upon whom it had been conferred as a reward for distinguished services. These were the advantages to which he was born, or which he inherited; and to these it must be added that

he was the son of a Pharisee, and the Pharisees were one of the most ancient and considerable sects among the Jews; he was early educated in Greek literature; and he was also brought up at the feet of the learned Jewish doctor Gamaliel, and, as he himself says, profited above many of his equals; and, to complete his education—in conformity with the Jewish practice, by which youth even of the highest rank were instructed in some mechanical employment, that if troublesome times arose they might be able to get their own living—he was taught the art of tent-making, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles; “he abode with Aquila, because he was of the same craft, for by their occupation they were tent-makers.”

In the second place, “such an one as Paul the aged” implies such an one in respect of personal endowments. Now his enemies said his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible; and the Apostle himself appears in some measure to confirm their judgment, when he says, “I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling; and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration

of the Spirit and of power;" and 'the thorn in the flesh,' which he himself says was given him that he might 'not be exalted above measure,' is thought by many to have been some bodily infirmity which impeded his usefulness. But, if these were his infirmities, he took pleasure in them and gloried in them, seeing that his weakness made it more manifest that the power of Christ rested on him. And, if these were his disadvantages, they were more than compensated by great natural talent, which he cultivated with the greatest success, as he applied it to the noblest ends. A celebrated critic of the ancients ranks him in the number of the most illustrious orators; and, if it were required, it would be easy to establish his claim to this distinction. In the instance of the Lycaonians,—after the miracle of healing the man who had been a cripple from his birth, and when the people were preparing to do sacrifice to himself and Barnabas as to two of their gods,—how like the most accomplished orator was it, when he had obtained a strong hold on the people's affections and wrought them to a state of the most perfect devotion towards himself, to seize on the very moment of their

greatest excitement and attachment, for the purpose of dissuading them from the vanities which they were following. What admirable discretion too, in the midst of those barbarians, in insisting only on the very elements of religion—the being, power, goodness, and providence of God! The most skilful of orators—he taught men as they were able to bear; and chose his arguments and adapted his style and selected his points, according to the variety and necessities of his auditory. To the barbarians of Lystra he enforced the simplest and most obvious truths; with those that ‘sought after wisdom,’ he disputed as a philosopher; the Jews also he encountered with their own weapons, and shewed himself mighty in those Scriptures which they esteemed the highest learning. With what quickness of perception and dexterity did he at Athens preach ‘the only true God,’ in the face of the law which forbade the introduction of any new object of worship, and yet without violating the law! He found there an altar already erected ‘to the unknown God;’ and he did not preach a new God, but only *declared* Him whom they ignorantly worshipped as unknown. Before Felix—at the mercy of a

cruel and lustful tyrant, who had soon silenced him had he denounced vengeance on his crimes — he reasoned with such tact and effect on righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, that his judge listened to him, and trembled after he had heard. Agrippa was a man of different character—a Jew, and one anxious to hear the Apostle—how masterly was the Apostle's proceeding! To a Jew he confessed himself a Jew, according to the most straitest sect; he declared that he still adhered to Moses and the Prophets; that once he himself thought, as Agrippa thought, in respect of Jesus of Nazareth, but that by a miracle he had been brought to his present condition; and then, hinging the whole controversy on the fact that Christ fulfilled only the law and the prophets, he asks of a Jew 'believest thou the Prophets?' as if it were impossible for a man to believe them without believing in Christ, as if it were impossible for a conscientious Jew not to become a Christian; and without waiting for an answer, which might have provoked obstinacy, or some shame or confusion, he himself answers the question, "I know that thou believest;" giving Agrippa the

fullest credit for sincerity; and having thus won upon his hearer, so that he avowed himself to be almost persuaded, what a favourable impression of the Christian character must have penetrated to Agrippa's heart when the Apostle added, "I would to God that thou wert both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds;" wishing him all the blessings and graces of which he himself was partaker, all but his bonds, his pains and sorrows. These instances shew that whatever were the disadvantages under which the Apostle laboured, ample amends was made in the powers of his mind. In almost his own words: "To the Jew, he became a Jew, that he might gain the Jews; to them that were without law, as without law, that he might gain them that were without; to the weak, as weak, that he might gain the weak: he became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some;" and this is what a man of ordinary talent would neither have ventured upon, nor have succeeded in if he had attempted it.

Thirdly: "Such an one as Paul the aged" implies such an one in respect of his fortunes. Now of the Apostle's worldly means, in the usual

acceptation, we have no certain information. We know not to what he was born, or what he inherited, or whether he forfeited any patrimonial substance by the course which his duty marked out. But whilst we are ignorant of these matters, the circumstance of his working with his own hands, that he might not be chargeable to the church, is evidence that, after his call to the Apostleship, he could not have been in a condition of affluence. Apart from this consideration, his fortunes, like those of his divine Master, were certainly not such as the natural will seeks or covets. His own account of these is as concise as any that could be drawn up.—In labours he was more abundant than others; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft; five times he received forty stripes save one; thrice he was beaten with rods; once stoned; thrice he suffered shipwreck; in journeyings often; in perils of waters, of robbers, of his own countrymen, of the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides those things which came upon him daily, the care of all the churches.

This is his own account of himself, and it is borne out by facts. But—perhaps, at the close of his life, when years multiplied, and strength failed; then it might be imagined that he reposed in peace, and reaped the fruits of his labours and sufferings, and in ease and quiet contemplated the way which the Lord had led him, until at the last, in the course of nature, he was gathered to his fathers. Alas! such as his life had been, such was his end. The most probable account is that after a second imprisonment at Rome, during which he suffered much, like his divine Master, through the desertion of some of his immediate followers, who ‘forsook him and fled,’ he was at length beheaded under the Emperor Nero; having nearly, but not quite attained to the venerable and proverbial age of threescore years and ten. Such is an epitome of the fortunes of ‘Paul the aged.’

We proceed to another and a most important implication of the words of our text. “Such an one as Paul the aged” means such an one in character. And here, indeed, a noble subject of contemplation is opened to us. His character always was, that he was blameless in his life and faithful to the dictates of his conscience.

Before his conversion, thinking that he verily “ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,” he persecuted the Church, conscientiously but ignorantly believing that he was doing God service; without public call or necessity imposed on him, he exerted himself to the utmost for the suppression of the Gospel. After his conversion, we see him in the prosecution of his purpose—the very opposite to that in which he first embarked—“travelling from country to country, enduring every species of hardship, encountering every extremity of danger, assaulted by the populace, punished by the magistrates, scourged, beaten, stoned, left for dead, expecting wherever he went a renewal of the same treatment and the same dangers; yet when driven from one city, preaching in the next, spending his whole time in the employment; sacrificing to it his pleasures, his ease, his safety, persisting in this course to old age, through more than thirty years; unaltered by the experience of perverseness, ingratitude, prejudice, desertion; unsubdued by anxiety, want, labour, persecutions; unwearied by long confinement, undismayed by the prospect of death.” This is his general

character, drawn by the hand of a master; and if we desire to be more particular, on what virtue shall we fix, and say that it was not his in an eminent degree? His zeal was unquestionable as it was beyond parallel; his sincerity cannot be disputed, when he surrendered all the bright prospects which his rank and talents opened before him for the cause of ‘the despised and rejected of men;’ his disinterestedness is out of the reach of controversy, for, working with his own hands for his daily support, all that he gained by the cause which he espoused was punishment, imprisonment, and, at the last, death; his honesty of heart and purpose is declared in that no sooner was a better light vouchsafed to him, than he acted in defiance of all his prejudices and worldly interests, and transferred all his energies to the cause which was the opposite of that in whose service he had gained celebrity; his piety may be seen in his shipwreck; his affectionate disposition is exhibited strongly in the case of Onesimus; his tender consideration for the necessities of the brethren, his earnest and affectionate concern for souls, are the spirit pervading his whole writings. But one virtue, perhaps, outshines the rest in

this galaxy of excellences; and that is the same for which every highly honoured servant of God is conspicuous, namely, his humility. He that was not a whit ‘behind the chiefest of the apostles,’ spake of himself as an abortion, one born out of due time: he that devoted his time, health, strength, exclusively for the promotion of the glory of Christ, counted not himself to have apprehended: he who had, if any who ever lived had, cause of holy rejoicing over the course which he had run, would not glory as if the praise were his; “by the grace of God I am what I am:” and no sooner did any spirit of boasting thrust itself forward, than it was instantly crushed, “I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was in me.”

There is another implication of the words “such an one as Paul the aged,” namely, such an one in prospects. But, as I purpose to conclude with the consideration of this—before we enter on it, let us briefly review what has already passed before us. We have remarked on St. Paul’s birth, rank, education, talents, fortunes, character. In some of these respects it is vain for any to wish to be like him.

Privileges of birth and talents come to us or not, according to the pleasure of another, without merit or demerit on our parts, although if God give them we are deeply responsible for the application of them. As to his fortunes, the Apostle himself would not have wished us his bonds, and we need not desire them; but his *character*, every one must surely allow that it claims the most thoughtful attention, and is such as ought to provoke emulation. In him we are presented with the instance of a person of high rank, according to the repute of his nation, of sound learning, of extensive acquirements, of splendid talents; who, without any conceivable motive of earthly profit or praise, surrendered all, endured and suffered all for the Gospel of Christ, and gloried in his sufferings; steadfastly for more than thirty years, adhering to his purpose—the very opposite, we repeat, of that with which he set out in life, and in the furtherance of which, had he continued in it, his worldly interests would have been most certainly promoted—until at length he sealed with his blood his unshaken devotion to the cause which he espoused. This then is not the case of a weak-minded man, on whose imagination it

would have been easy to work for good or for evil: his is not the case of an enthusiast, for if an enthusiast had pretended to the vision which St. Paul saw, he would have seen it only as urging him on in the cause in which he was already engaged, whereas St. Paul was diverted from his: his is not the case of one deceiving or deceived, for there was no motive to practise deception, and there was too sound a judgment to be imposed upon: his is not the case of a man of questionable morals, but of one of the most unvarying conscientiousness throughout life: his, though a sudden conversion, can never be mistaken for a passing impulse, for it had the long experiment of more than thirty years of uniform consistency.

With reason has the conversion of St. Paul been alone considered a sufficient proof of the truth of Christianity: and who, with the character of the Apostle before him, and with the thought of eternity present to his mind, does not admire his character, and feel an earnest desire to be partaker of his praise: such unimpeachable morals,—such steadfastness of principle,—such unwearied zeal in a good cause,—such disinterestedness,—such courage,—such humbleness of

soul,—such perseverance to the end. And if these charm us, and we wish that these properties were ours, shall not a consideration of his prospects move us more effectually to a holy rivalry; so that in this respect also we may be “such as Paul the aged?” What were St. Paul’s prospects? he himself has told us: ‘I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed;’ ‘henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.’ But, if St. Paul and the Gospel had said nothing of his prospects, could we, without violence to our nature, our hearts, and consciences, have believed that death was his destruction? Set against the case of St. Paul, whose life was self-denial, who excelled in every grace and virtue, whose time and talents were devoted to the glory of God and the welfare of man; and who reaped no other earthly reward than pains and imprisonment, and persecution to the death: set against his case that of a selfish man, one born to large means, of great talents or influence, and whose sole aim is to please and aggrandise self; utterly careless of the interests

of religion, and indifferent to the welfare of his neighbour, and who lives and dies in the indulgence of this lust, without experience of trouble or reverse. Set the one case against the other: can we believe it to be in the ordinance of the moral Governor of the Universe that this selfish man should be better provided for in respect of happiness than the Apostle? yet so it would be if death were the Apostle's destruction; for where there is a seared conscience there is no alloy to the selfish man's happiness, so long as there is aught to gratify his propensity; and we have supposed this to be the case unto the end. It is not possible that death could be the Apostle's destruction; it might be possible—although even then it would be almost impossible to believe it—it might be possible if there were no God; or if one of infinite wisdom had made all men for naught; or if one of infinite benevolence had placed a lying faculty in the breasts of all His creatures: but if there is any truth or meaning in conscience, if there is a God, there must be a reward for the righteous. He that is God must be the friend of virtue: but how was He St. Paul's friend, if death were the Apostle's destruction? It is true that He gave him being,

fed and clothed him, and upheld him in his troubles, and delivered him in danger: but if this were all the Apostle's reward, this providential care and deliverance only sent him forth again to troubles and sorrows which lasted all the days of his life; and only enabled him to make greater sacrifices of all that man by nature loves and seeks. Oh! but some infidel mind would be ready to urge, 'virtue is its own reward;' and Paul had his in the satisfaction of his mind whilst he was walking in that which he believed to be the path of duty. And certainly the Apostle had this satisfaction; but this satisfaction was satisfactory only in that it promised him beyond the grave, glory, honour, and immortality; and if this promise were vain, the Apostle had reaped more substantial recompense if he had served self with half the zeal with which he had served God and man.

Reasoning on only the simplest truths of religion, the being of God, and His being a lover and rewarder of virtue, we cannot but believe that when Paul ceased from his labours he entered on that "rest which remaineth for the people of God;" when his troubles and sorrows ended, his glory began. These were the pros-

pects set before him by the Spirit of God; and He is not a man that he should lie. If we desire these prospects to be set before us, and the Spirit of God to apply them to our support and comfort when the evil days of sickness, infirmity, and death draw near; let us labour that, in the character of servants of God and Christ, we may be “such as Paul the aged.” And is there *now* any resemblance between us? Can we look back on the past, as he could, and trace an uniform life of good morals, a consistent life of principle? Can we refer, as he could, to any period of considerable improvement, when better light breaking in upon us, we at once put it out to usury in better practice? Has it been our exercise, as it was his, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men? Can we say, as he truly could, that the glory of God has ever been the paramount object with us? Can we appeal, as he could, to abundant works of brotherly love? We are rich, perhaps—I do not say that this is sinful, but so was not Paul; and there is ample opportunity for the righteous disposal of superfluous wealth. We are living in ease and luxury, perhaps—I do not say that therefore we are guilty, but so did

not Paul; and the walks of Christian usefulness and the claims of Christian exertion are as many and various now as they were in his day. We are gifted, perhaps, with great natural endowments; so was Paul: do we dedicate them first and chiefly to worldly interests?—so did not Paul. Is devotion our habit, humility our clothing, benevolence our labour; and is faith in Christ the moving spring of all?—so was it with Paul: and for him there was laid up a crown of life; but not for him only, but for every one that, like him, loveth the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

SERMON XVIII.

PURE RELIGION AND UNDEFILED BEFORE GOD.

JAMES i. 27.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

THE fate of the Apostle James and his writings is somewhat singular. According to the received accounts he suffered martyrdom for boldly professing his faith in Christ; yet his works have suffered a species of martyrdom because he is supposed to have depreciated faith. The accusation, however, is most unjust. Saint Paul, indeed, taught that a man is "justified by faith without the deeds of the law;" and St. James, that "by works a man is justified and not by faith only." The difference of doctrine is only seeming, and such as can be easily reconciled.

St. Paul meant that believers in Christ are saved, without the observance of the Mosaic Law, or perfect obedience to any law. St. James taught that believers shall not be saved without the works of Christian obedience. And there is no disagreement between them; for St. Paul elsewhere declared that, "neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but the keeping of the commandments of God."

A like injustice may easily be done the Apostle James from the passage selected for our text. He there states, that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Some may be tempted to enquire, is this the whole of religion? what, then, becomes of the necessity of faith? and are not the fear and love of God essentials of religion, for these are not named? The answer to such queries is at once simple and satisfactory. St. James is here speaking of the effects, not of the principles of religion. In the few preceding verses he gave some practical proofs of the absence of true religion, such as men being hearers and not doers, and not bridling their tongues: in the

text, in like manner, he sets down practical evidences of the presence of true religion, such as "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world." If it had been his purpose on this occasion to speak of the principles of religion, he would doubtless have insisted as imperatively on the necessity of faith as the other Apostles did. But as the great fault of the Jewish Christians, to whom he was writing, was, that they perverted the doctrine of justification by faith so as to preclude the necessity of a holy practice; the aim of the Apostle was to check and counteract this evil: and the most effectual and direct course for him to pursue with this intention was to insist on the importance of practice. And that the Apostle spoke of the practice, and not the principles, of religion is further evident, from the circumstance that the word rendered in our text 'religion' signifies in strictness of interpretation 'divine worship or service;' and, therefore, the more literal sense of the text is, that no kind of religious service rendered to God can be of avail without "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world."

Having given this general account of our text, and met certain exceptions which might arise; we may, with prospect of advantage to ourselves bestow upon it a more circumstantial examination. Let us, then, consider the Apostle's doctrine in both its negative and affirmative bearings.

First then, the Apostle does not say, and his doctrine denies, that true religion consists in forms and ceremonies. The fallacy of depending on these is repeatedly urged; yet so long as 'to do' is easier than 'to be,' the necessity for exposing the folly will continue in full force. Forms and ceremonies are useful and necessary, seeing that without them even personal devotion would itself grow languid and perish; but then to rest in them—as it is a habit which insensibly grows upon one, so does it tend at last to the utter destruction of religion. Many doubtless have come to this state, that they are satisfied with saying their prayers, attending their church, and reading their Bible, without any serious thought, whether religion is doing its proper work in their hearts and lives, and without endeavour to promote it. Now under no dispensation that has ever been vouchsafed would this have passed for religion in the judgment of God;

although it may have contented the consciences of thousands, and answered their purpose in the eyes of men, and in the estimation of society. Even under the Jewish economy, which was peculiarly one of ordinances, this would not have passed for religion; for what said God by the mouth of His prophet, to those who trusted in such vanities? “to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him: wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? is not *this* the fast that I have chosen; to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free; and that ye break every yoke: is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” Even *then* we see—even under a preparatory economy for disciplining the mind for the true religion—in this state of schoolmastership to bring men unto Christ—external performances were not accepted as true religion; how much less can it be so now, when we are taught, not in proverbs, but plainly, that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

It is our duty, indeed, to insist on forms and to observe them; and, principally, for the reasons already assigned: but it ought to be constantly urged upon us and fixed in our minds, that their virtue consists in their being a means to an end; and if the end is not contemplated and pursued, the means are worse then useless; for they are hypocritical and wicked, and, the form of godliness being substituted for the power, wrath also is substituted in the issue for that reward which is set before us in the Gospel.

Secondly: the Apostle does not say, and his doctrine denies, that true religion consists in superstitious rites and sacrifices. These are often cruel and immoral; and St. James's religion is kind and holy. That much of heathenism and ignorant superstition shall be looked upon mercifully by Him, who is not a hard or unreasonable Master, seeking to reap where He has not sown, we may be allowed to believe for other reasons, indeed, but also because of the sincerity by which it is characterized. When we hear of men submitting to most grievous privations, torturing their bodies, and sacrificing their lives, their wives and children, in obedience to a law which, in their ignorance, they consider

obligatory; we cannot forbear from the confession that greater evidences could none vouchsafe of the genuineness of their faith, and also of their willingness to obey the true faith, if it were made known unto them; and we cannot believe them altogether excluded from the tender consideration of Him who has assigned them their present earthly portion; nor from the forgiveness of the ‘Father of Mercies.’ We turn from them in pity, indeed, and say “they are foolish, they know not the way of the Lord:” but if we view them with pity, it is not also with an undivided feeling of triumph, exultation, or superiority: for far and wide may the eye often wander in a Christian land before it shall light upon the like conscientious surrender of self, ease, and fortune in the behalf of a cause which, not in our ignorance, but in the soberest exercise of our reason, and the fullest blaze of moral illumination, we believe to be the cause of God and our immortal souls. But still such superstition is not true religion, although it may boast of a sincerity of rare worth amongst the professors of the true faith.

And if heathenish superstition is not ‘pure and undefiled religion,’ assuredly Romish superstition is not; for, being without excuse of such

ignorance, it wilfully blinds men to the everlasting importance of Saint James's religion, that is, of 'being good' and 'doing good.' The one, the importance of *being* good, is obviated by the superstition of granting indulgences, and by their doctrine of a purgatory, from which the soul may be released by the prayers of others, and by masses; the other, the importance of *doing* good, is in a measure superseded by their priests' usurpation of a power which belongs not to the Christian dispensation; namely, that of a vicarious ministration, whereby personal devotion and service are so far precluded that the priest offers in the stead of others; and the great mass of the people are enabled to serve God by proxy.—When we touch on these, or other superstitions of the Roman church, we have reason to thank God that we, as a church, are free from them: but that our cause of thanksgiving may never be diminished, it is prudent to pause frequently, and examine whether we ourselves are not unwittingly forging those chains for ourselves which it is our complaint that others riveted on us, and our glory that we have broken asunder. The Jews, we know, boasted that they

were never in bondage to any man, even when at the very time they were in subjection to the Romans; and in like manner, Protestants may boast of an emancipation from Romish errors, even when they are actually under the dominion of them. Undoubtedly there is in the Reformed church, as in the Romish, a too general propensity to trust in our name and privileges; and if this propensity be not vigilantly guarded, it will readily introduce among us Romish superstitions, as with the Romans it facilitated the admission of Pagan ones. We are too disposed, notwithstanding our boast that the Bible is our religion, to place our dependance on human authority instead of searching the Scriptures for ourselves. We are too prone to consider the Christian minister in the character of a priest; to officiate not with us, but for us, and in our stead; and in times of spiritual emergency, to look up to him as in the place of God, and as if by virtue of his office he could absolutely forgive sin. It cannot be denied that these tendencies are far too prevalent with us; and no wonder, since their origin is in human nature, and not, as many think, in the priestcraft of any particular church: but if they be not diligently

watched and checked, we may find ourselves at length in the condition of the church of Sardis, which had a name that she lived whilst she was dead ; counting ourselves pure and reformed, whilst the worst corruptions are thriving within.

But, again: St. James does not assert, and his doctrine denies, that true religion is a mere science. If it were not for that which sometimes passes under our own observation, and which therefore we may believe to be far more common, it might seem utterly a waste of time to dwell upon a notion so monstrous, that knowledge is religion; when every increase of at least religious knowledge that is let in upon the mind itself points further on and to practice. Yet, unquestionably, however strange the notion is, there are numbers affecting the religious character, the sum of whose religion consists in hearing, reading, knowing, disputing, judging. They read much of religious subjects; they study the Sacred Volume either for the mere purpose of accumulating knowledge, or to arm themselves with weapons in support of some party view; they are skilful disputants; they have a plentiful store of citations from the Word of God, and oftentimes draw from the same as if Scripture

throughout were nothing more than an assemblage of proverbs, and any or every quotation might be used independently of the context; they are vain of their discrimination of ministers, and proud of their choice: but when we have noted these things of the party under review, we have the sum of their religion, and it evidently is not St. James's religion; for whilst he makes it to consist in the 'being good' and 'doing good;' these, which with him are essentials of religion, are with them only speculative points, if they at all enter into their imagination.

Once more, and lastly: St. James does not assert, and his doctrine denies, that true religion consists in feelings, in warmth of affection for, in an admiration or reverence of, sacred things; and if it consists not in feelings, much less can it consist in expressions of them, in loud or heated or vehement professions of them, or protestation that we have them. If we are possessed of these feelings, we have, indeed, much of what religion requires us to *be*; but if this is all, and we are only possessed of them, there is the absence of what true religion requires us to *do*. It is possible for a man to muse upon heaven so as to forget the earth;

to have his affections so set on the end of his journey, as to neglect the intermediate steps and preparations. This is the fault of the contemplative : and, being a fault, is not a part of true religion. True religion came down from heaven to take us up thither; but finding the course marked out for us by her own Divine Author and Finisher to lie upon the earth, laid out in varied walks of duty and usefulness; it is not her way to snatch us up suddenly (as if we were here by mistake), and to take us out of the world, while it is the Divine pleasure that we should be in it; nor to frustrate the will of God by altogether abstracting our thoughts and energies elsewhere, whilst the work given us to do is *here*: but she leads us rather than ravishes; guides, strengthens, and quickens our hands and feet, instead of neutralizing their powers; and although it is her constant monition, “set your affection on things above,” it is as certainly her warning that he who would ascend whither the Saviour hath gone before must follow in the same path, and tread in the same steps of holy, useful, and benevolent exertion.

We have seen, in certain leading particulars,

what St. James's doctrine does not allow to be true religion. It remains that we glance at his doctrine in its affirmative character. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." This definition has abundant recommendations. It is the doctrine of an inspired Apostle; its simplicity favours the persuasion that it is truth; and it possesses a natural beauty which, like the true religion itself in operation, shames all others, and gains upon the affections, and obtains the assent of the understanding without debate or enforcement. There is a difficulty in persuading men that penances and pilgrimages, and torturings of the body, and the life of an anchorite, are true religion; and the reasonable part of mankind will not believe of them farther than that they may be useful as means to an end, but not the end itself. When, however, we tell them that true religion is the 'being' good and the 'doing' good, there is at once the craving of conscience after such perfection, and the spontaneous acknowledgment of a reflecting mind, that this must be what God requires. God himself

having placed us in a state of society, it may well require argument to convince us that a life of seclusion and austerity is His pleasure. He himself seeking the good of souls by the mild and merciful tenor of His government, it is hard to be persuaded that persecution can ever be doing His work in the way in which He would have it to be done. But when we tell men that true religion demands that we *be* good, God's witness in our hearts assures us that such is the divine will; when we say that it demands that we *do* good; the means of good which God himself hath put into our hands, the claims with which he hath surrounded us, together with the feelings which he hath set in our nature responding to them, and His own example of doing good and never doing evil,—these things again admit not of an argument; but we are convinced without discussion, and we give that ready assent which is due to a self-evident axiom—that no religion is trustworthy which seeks not these ends of “being good and doing good;” and that these ends must not only be contemplated by the true religion, but be true religion itself in operation or practice. We say “the true religion in practice,” for it is neces-

sary to repeat that St. James was speaking of practice, and nothing which the Apostle said, or we have remarked, should be construed so as to supersede the necessity or weaken the virtue of religious principles. Good principles are as necessary to good practice, as good and right seed to the nature and healthiness of a plant; they are necessary, moreover, because they are required by Him who looketh to the heart; they are necessary, because He who hath the right to determine the motive (as well as the matter of the creature's duty) hath declared that He will weigh the actions by it.

A rational and amiable, as well as a Christian, view of religion is set before us by the inspired Apostle. If, persuaded of its truth and charmed with its beauty, we desire to convert it to our souls' good, we shall believe in God our Maker and Preserver; in God the Son, our Redeemer; in God the Holy Ghost, our Regenerator and Sanctifier: and this our belief will not be suffered by us to lie as a talent in a napkin, or buried in the earth; but will be put out to usury, in the cultivation of personal holiness and the promotion of happiness. It is sometimes asked in a scoffing manner, what signifies a man's creed? We might answer, that if it is nothing, it

signifies nothing, or nothing more than a sounding deceit. But if it is what a creed ought to be, a principle of conduct, it signifies every thing ; for out of it are the issues of life and death. The infidel's creed, if it were his governing principle, would lead him in defiance of all human and divine restraints to the worst excesses of human nature ; the Christian's, to the purest example and the truest happiness on the face of the earth. Let us so endeavour to exhibit our faith. Amidst the divisions in the religious world, and the subtleties of religious disputation, let us keep our own attention firmly and irrevocably fixed on the character of true religion as propounded by an inspired Apostle ; and let us strive that it be not blasphemed through our practice. Holding the mystery of the faith once delivered unto the saints, let it be our endeavour to hold it in a pure conscience, void of offence toward God and man. Not content with forms and ceremonies ; not trusting in a name, or in pretences, or professions, or feelings ; not treating religion as a mere science, but as a rule of heart and life : let us make it our constant prayer and labour to *be good*, “ to keep ourselves unspotted from the world ;” and to this end, let us avoid temptation, resist evil

counsel and example, keep ourselves strictly to God's ordinances, and cultivate those good gifts which come down from above, and which, being given in answer to prayer, cleanse the thoughts, and raise and purify the affections. And whilst we thus promote the work of personal holiness, 'to *do* good and to distribute let us forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' And let us do it according to the ability which God hath given us, the means and opportunities which he himself hath placed in our hands for this very purpose; and for the employment of which we must one day give strict account. Let us look around in our respective spheres, and see what walks of love and usefulness are open to us; and there let us strive to be known—if not of men, yet of God—as visiting and comforting the fatherless and widows in their affliction; instructing the ignorant, recovering the lost, encouraging the weak, ministering to the necessities of the poor; in a word, diffusing that happiness which it is His pleasure should be spread abroad who is the Author and Upholder of our own, and to whom alone we look for the everlasting gift.—If this we do, and in this we abound, and do it heartily and humbly

as unto the Lord and not unto man; our path may not, perhaps, be strewed with roses, our consciences shall still indeed have whereof to accuse us, and disappointments and trials may still fall to our inheritance; our stores may not be so plentiful as theirs who hoard them up in piles, that earth as well as heaven may not possibly mistake the amount of their selfishness and ingratitude; our days will not be spent in that ease and langour which are the habit of many men's lives, who, nevertheless, have no misgivings of that Saviour's praise who himself went about doing good; our religion may not suit the taste of the speculative, nor be showy enough to meet the views of the fanatic;—but whilst these things, one or more, may be against us, *this* shall be for us, that in the fear and love of God, and in humble dependence on the merits and mediation of the Saviour, we are working out that religion which an inspired Apostle pronounced to be “pure and undefiled before God the Father,” and adorning that doctrine which “without works is dead,” but which, abounding in the lively fruits of holiness and charity, is the savour of life unto life eternal.

SERMON XIX.

WHAT IS MAN?

PSALM cxliv. 3.

Lord, what is man that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man that thou makest account of him.

HERE is suggested a question which, one would think, must occasionally have occupied the attention of every human being capable of reflection. We can scarcely imagine that any, except the savage or idiot, can pass through the several stages of his present existence without making the enquiry, "What am I?"

How much more likely is the question to force itself on the Christian's attention! His condition by grace, as well as by nature, prompts the enquiry, "What is man, that God on his account should give up his well-beloved Son to humiliation, suffering, and death?" "What is man," that the Supreme Being should so eminently

desire his obedience, and, in such manifold ways, seek his everlasting welfare ?

Before we attempt any solution of the question, let us glance at that which evidently was the exciting cause of the admiration expressed in our text. It plainly appears from the Psalm, that David had recently experienced some signal token of the Divine goodness and protection; and that this it was which called forth his acknowledgment of his own unworthiness, in the exclamation, “What is man!” God had blessed him with victory over his enemies; and he expressed his astonishment at the divine favour being extended to one, so ‘like to vanity,’ and whose ‘days are as a shadow that passeth away.’

If we are unable to call to mind any like special cause of thanksgiving in the way of temporal mercies; yet have we abundant proofs of the Divine regard to our race in particular; and there is ample room for the demand, Wherefore has man been so eminently distinguished by the Universal Creator ?

First—in the instance of his Creation: how strongly was man exhibited as an especial object of the Divine favour. Every thing was prepared

for his sustenance and comfort; the heavens spread out as a canopy above him, and garnished with the greater and lesser lights, ‘for signs and for seasons, for days and for years;’ the earth laid out as a garden of pleasure and usefulness, and, together with the waters, received the Divine blessing of fruitfulness; sounds the most harmonious, colours the most grateful to the vision, were lavished to profusion: and, when all things were in readiness, a significant pause occurred in the work of creation—that the thing to be done might be the better noted, and the creature marked out for greater honour—and, then, man came forth a being, curiously and wonderfully made; of exquisite structure, of moral endowments, of spiritual and heavenly capabilities, of most pleasurable affections: less indeed in size, inferior in various particulars of strength and activity, to many over whom he was constituted ‘lord;’ but with a mind which should more than compensate for any physical disadvantages, and reduce to his dominion the creatures appointed for his government and use. It cannot be denied that man was eminently distinguished and honoured of his Maker in his original formation.

“The mindfulness of God” to us ward is also displayed in the vigilance with which His Providence watcheth over the work of His hands. An ancient writer in the Church expressed himself to the effect, that that Providence which taketh care of all, taketh such care of each as if there were none beside. But the Saviour himself saith “the very hairs of our head are all numbered;” and the Psalmist declares that even before we emerge into this life we are objects of God’s watchful superintendence; “my substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth; thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”

But as it may be said that the Providence of God extends to other creatures, and not to man only, let us pass to another and less questionable proof of the singular honour which God hath done our nature. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.” Christ took not on him the nature of angels; but He took on him the seed of Abraham: how immensely privileged,

advanced, and exalted is human nature, by the fact that the Son of God once wore it; nay, that it is now united with the Divine; and that the Redeemer shall appear in it when He shall come in His glory with the holy angels as Judge of the earth. He took not on Him the nature of angels, or the seraph form, but appeared in all respects, except sin, as man, as one of ourselves; indeed, as man in his lowest estate. Here, again, it cannot be denied that man has been extraordinarily honoured by the Godhead. And further, man is eminently distinguished in that he alone of terrestrial beings holds present intercourse with heaven; and to him alone of them is there the promise of everlasting blessedness.

In these points, which, rather than discussing, I have noted for private reflection, God's mindfulness of man is pre-eminently conspicuous. We proceed, then, to the very interesting enquiry, founded on such proofs of the Divine favour to us—What is man, that God hath such respect unto him, or so regardeth him? What is man, that God hath made him what he is, invested him with such dominion, honoured his nature in the manner specified, and prepared for him such glory hereafter?

The readiest answers to these questions are not only humbling, but they do not help us in solving the mystery. Ask of the Psalmist—What is man? and he answers, “verily, every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.” Or ask of holy Job,—“man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble; he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not.” Ask of the fashion of the day,—and man would seem to be a figure in a pageant, the butterfly of a sunny hour. Ask of business,—and he might often be thought a slave condemned to labour for another’s gain, without peace or profit to himself. Ask of the philosopher,—he is ignorant and full of self-conceit and enslaved by prejudices. Ask of the physician,—the answer is, a wonderful mechanism, so perfect that no art of man can devise any improvement; so mysterious, that it surpasses human skill to fathom the secrets of thought, will, and motion; so strong, that it is equal to astonishing feats of power and activity; so weak, that a pin or feather may work its destruction.

These answers, however just and true, do not furnish us with any satisfactory reason wherefore

God is thus mindful of man and so regardeth him. It cannot be because of the beauty of his form, or the excellency of his nature; for these are the effects, and not the causes of the Divine regard to him: it cannot be because of the vanity of his life, the perverseness of his will, and the instability of his counsels; for these would rather estrange than attract the Divine esteem. Let us, then, seek for accounts which shall better content the inquisitive mind.

First: it is manifest that man is God's viceroy on the earth, appointed to do His will, to promote His religion, to spread His praise, to execute His laws, to distribute His bounty, to succour the needy, to strengthen and comfort the good, to reform the evil, to uphold and regulate society, to evangelize the world. This may be one reason of the honour done to man by his Creator. In the same way as a sovereign raises to high dignities the person selected for his representative, so may we believe that the Almighty Governor of the universe hath proceeded with respect to man. Choosing him for his sensible moral agent in the administration of this world's affairs, "He made him in His own likeness, and after His own image;" clothed

him with honour, and endowed him with peculiar powers and privileges, necessary for the sustentation of his dignity, and the discharge of his delegated office. As he was to be the servant of the Most High, he made him erect, that he might habitually contemplate the Being from whom his authority is derived. As he was to hold command over the rest of the creation and what was sensual in his own nature, the master-mind was breathed into him. As he was to be a dispenser of God's laws, and, to a certain extent, of temporal rewards and punishments, the moral sense was implanted in him, that he might execute justice towards others, as well as maintain his general integrity; and as he was to be the steward of God's bounty, and to diffuse that happiness which his Master desireth for all and each, a variety of tender and delicate emotions was engrafted in his breast, and which by rising at the sight or knowledge of pain or grief, should be his constant counsellors to the 'love of mercy.'

This reason will probably suffice to ordinary enquirers, wherefore such eminent favour has been shewn of God towards man in his temporal character. It is true that it only partially

solves the question. It may account for the honour rendered to man after his election for the purposes named; but it does not satisfy the demand, wherefore man, in the first instance, was fixed upon by the Creator to occupy the station which he holds. And this question must be left without explanation. The answer to it is bound up in those inscrutable attributes of freedom and sovereignty which are the peculiar secrets of the Lord our God. All that we can say is, that it pleased God to choose man for the office; but this having seemed good in His sight, the favour shewn to man may be accounted for by the consideration of the office which he was appointed to fill.

In like manner, if we proceed further, and ask, What is man, that God hath taken such knowledge of him in his spiritual character, and made such account of him, as to give His Son to death that he might escape from misery? and to vouchsafe him a written Revelation for his direction, and the constant ministration of His Spirit for his light and comfort? There is much which we must be content to leave without full intelligence. The just answers seem to be that 'God is love,' and that He hath made

man immortal and responsible; but we must be content to build on these doctrines of Scripture, and not be curious in the investigation of them. If we ask, "How does it consist with Infinite love, that creatures should be called into the world capable of working out for themselves endless misery?" although we may guess in what way benevolence to the *universe* may consist with the example of disobedience in a state of suffering, yet we come not at length to any thorough satisfaction; this is reserved, perhaps, for the comfort and joy of the spirits of just men made perfect. And again, if we ask why God made man immortal? we are involved in the depths of mystery. But, arguing on the strength and undisputed testimony of the Scripture, "that God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity," we may then use this counsel of God as a reason wherefore He, 'who is love,' hath manifested such tender concern for the salvation of those who have eternal life and endless misery before them; and who, by the law of their being, cannot fail of the one without incurring the other. In the exercise of His sovereignty, He created us for immortality; of

His infinite love “He willeth not that any should perish;” and He hath done and devised all which, consistently with his counsel in calling such a creature into being, and consistently with the nature of that creature, He could devise and do, to save them from wrath.

And here we may rest for a moment, and reflect how admirably the Gospel account chimes in with that which we know to be the state of man in his temporal character. We cannot dispute that man as a terrestrial being is an object of especial favour on the part of the Creator. The Gospel requires of us to believe only that this favour has been manifested towards us in a higher, although an infinitely higher, degree; that the same love which made us and constituted us such as we are, hath also redeemed us; and the fact that God hath undoubtedly manifested extraordinary regard to us in one estate or capacity, is surely presumptive argument that He hath done so towards us in any other capacity. But—it is sometimes objected against the doctrine of our Redemption, that man is so unworthy of the wondrous interposition of Almighty God in his behalf. It is said to be a thing incredible that so

exalted a Being as the Son of God should concern Himself in our spiritual welfare. What is man (it is triumphantly asked) that God should become his Redeemer? With equal pertinency and force we might ask, What is man that God should honour him as he has honoured him in his place in creation? That God hath done the one is surely a presumption that he may have done the other. The unworthiness of the creature is equal in both cases: but if it was suitable to the dignity of the Creator to call into being and so to honour such perverse and frail creatures; it could not be inconsistent with the dignity of God the Son to redeem them: if the creation of man was, as the fact proves it to have been, a work worthy of God; his redemption, that is, his creation to an eternity of happiness, could not have been derogatory to the dignity of God the Son.

The answer which I have rendered to the enquiry, 'What is man,' is twofold: first, that he is a vicegerent of Almighty God, which accounts for the singular regard paid to him beyond other creatures as an earthly being; and, secondly, that he is immortal and responsible; and this accounts for the amazing scheme of redemption,

which God, who is love, hath devised and perfected for his soul's welfare.

I am aware that there are many religious instructors who would have returned far different accounts of the matter under consideration; many who, doubtless with good intentions, make it a practice to decry man to such a degree that they would place us on a level with, if not beneath, the beasts that perish. This view may be to a certain degree accurate in respect of man in his savage estate, and of some few besides who cast off all restrictions of morals and law, and whose nature is almost if not altogether effaced by their abuse of their privileges and endowments; but it is by no means just when applied universally to our race, and much less when applied to the conscientious Christian. It is true, indeed, that we were formed out of the ground and shall return to the dust; it is true that we are frail, perishable mortals; and that in a few short years we must lie down in death with 'corruption as our father, and the worm for our mother and sister;' it is true, moreover, that we are degenerate and sinful beings, perverse in our wills and sensual in our affections, and constant transgressors of

God's perfect law: all this is true: but it is equally true that we are God's vicegerents on the earth, and that we are heirs of eternity: and these facts of our history, together with those other marks of the Divine favour towards us which have been pointed out, do not sanction the belief that we are so utterly vile and worthless as some represent man to be: neither does it appear that the interests of virtue and religion are most likely to be promoted by holding forth such extreme views of man's condition.

We know full well what manifold benefits are lost to society in the instances of those who are unduly impressed with a sense of their own insignificance; and similar are the evils in a religious point of view. Let a man be reduced in his own estimation to the lowest grade, and his energies are paralyzed. He neglects without compunction the various duties which devolve on him, as if his discharge of them were impossible or nothing worth; he either throws off all religion as not suited to him, or casts himself altogether on the free mercy of God, who he trusts will do all for him as he can do nothing for himself. Furnish him on the contrary with just notions of his circumstances, condition,

capabilities, and prospects, and a wide field is opened to him for honourable and religious exertion; a multitude of ways by which, sinful and weak as he is, he may yet approve himself to his God; and a stimulus is applied by which he shall be urged forward, instead of reposing in a sullen and barren apathy.

The truth of the case demands that we think not too meanly as well as not too highly of ourselves. The Scriptures and our own hearts instruct us that we are fallen, sinful, prone to evil, weak in purpose, debased in affections, perverse in will: but they also inform us that we are ordained for high and noble purposes; and that we are especial objects of the Divine consideration; and capable of most excellent things. As we have meditated on these matters, let us strive to profit by them. To us, as earthly vicegerents of God, much ability is committed, whereby we may promote His will on the earth. Let us do our Master's work, and as He would that it should be done. Let us give ourselves to works of usefulness and love; and no man is so isolated but he has a sphere in which he may do good by his example, at least; and few are so limited in means that they cannot help in

diffusing that happiness which is the Creator's delight. Let us have constant respect to our Master's pleasure and to His method of proceeding; and let us make these our supreme rule of conduct. Wherever there is good to be done, and which we can do, let us cheerfully accomplish it, knowing it to be His will, and accounting His approbation the highest reward. Wherever there is temptation to evil, let us fly from it as unworthy a being whom the Governor of the Universe hath invested with high moral endowments, and created in His own likeness of righteousness and true holiness. And the more to encourage us and comfort us in the discharge of the duties of our stewardship, let us bear constantly in our remembrance that we are somewhat better than the pageants of a day, somewhat more enduring than the fleshly tabernacle in which we are clothed. By the will of God we are immortal! How supporting and cheering is this thought to us, when, harassed with cares and sorrows, we can consistently with the Word of God look through their gloom to a day of perpetual brightness! but how dreadful to the wicked, that, however they may embitter existence, there is no way of escape from eternity,

but that the decree of God is that they must for ever be such as in the exercise of their own discretion they make themselves to be. Oh! may the consideration of the station in which the Creator hath placed us, urge us to pursuits more becoming to us than the pleasures of sense; may the history of what God hath done for our souls, excite us to seek first and above all things the kingdom of God. However reckless the sinner may be of his eternal state, God is evidently and deeply concerned about it, and accounts it a matter of the highest moment. Whatever unbelievers may think of the joys of heaven, or the misery of lost souls; that glory which cost in its purchase the precious blood of Christ, must be of transcendent worth; and that misery from which there was no escape but through His unutterable humiliation and pains, must be indeed a fearful revelation of wrath! The Divine dispensations, judgments, statutes, ordinances, have all mainly in view our souls' good;—this is no doubtful significance that, in the judgment of God, our salvation is the one thing above all things needful to us: let us not be wanting to ourselves and our best and never-ending interests, but seek salvation—so as to

find it—first and above all things—by walking *worthily* of that creation in which we were made in the image of God; and worthily of that redemption, by which we have been redeemed from sin as well as from death.

SERMON XX.

BELSHAZZAR SLAIN.

DANIEL v. 30.

*In that night was Belshazzar the king of the
Chaldeans slain.*

BELSHAZZAR was the last king of Babylon. He was the grandson of the famous Nebuchadnezzar, famous in history, both for the eventful and melancholy story of his own life, as well as because, in his reign, an end was put to the kingdom of Judah, and the temple of Jerusalem burnt. Nebuchadnezzar had caused some of the vessels of Solomon's temple to be carried into the land of Shinar, and to be placed in the temple of his own God, Belus. Belshazzar, holding a great national festival, commanded that these same vessels should be brought and applied to the purposes of the feast. And "the king, and his princes, and his wives, and his concubines, drank in them; and praised the

gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.” In the same hour came forth the fingers of a man’s hand; and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king’s palace. And the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king’s countenance was changed: and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against the other. The king sent for the astrologers, the Chaldeans and soothsayers, but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. The writing (it is conjectured) was in the old Samaritan character, which was very different from the Chaldaic. This would account for their being unable to read it. By the advice of the Queen, the Prophet Daniel was called. Great promotion and honours were promised him, if he would interpret the writing: these he declined, and without fee or reward he made known the writing and the interpretation thereof. And in the same night, the enemy, taking advantage of that season of revelry, entered the city; and Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans was slain.

This is the portion of history with which our

text is concerned. First, let us remark on the fulfilment of Prophecy here exhibited; secondly, on the sins which are specially laid to Belshazzar's charge; thirdly, on his sentence; and, in conclusion, I shall endeavour to make somewhat of a practical application of the subject.

First: we are to notice the fulfilment of Prophecy. Babylon was a very great and ancient city. It is called in Scripture 'great Babylon,' 'the glory of kingdoms;' 'the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency;' 'the golden city;' 'the lady of kingdoms;'—and its beauty, strength, and grandeur; its walls, temples, palaces, and hanging gardens, and the artificial canals, are described with such pomp and magnificence by heathen authors that it might be deservedly reputed one of the wonders of the world. Whoever was the founder of it, it seems certain from Nebuchadnezzar's own language, that he had greatly repaired, enlarged, and beautified it: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?" Such a city as this, one would imagine, was in no danger of being totally abandoned and coming to naught. She boasted that she should continue

for ever: "I shall be a lady for ever;" "I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children." But the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, plainly and particularly foretold the destruction of this city: the one about one hundred and sixty years before the event; the latter about sixty years: and they speak with such confidence and certainty that they describe the thing future, as if it were already past: thus, Isaiah says, "*Babylon is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground;*" and Jeremiah, "*Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed.*"

But not only do they speak in general terms of the event, they also enter, most wonderfully, into certain particulars. Cyrus; the conqueror of Babylon, and who transferred the empire to the Medes and Persians, is mentioned by name above a hundred years before he was born. It was foretold that God would stir up the Medes and Persians against it. "Go up, O Elam!" "besiege, O Media!" "the Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, for his device is against Babylon to destroy it." It was predicted that the river should be dried up before the city should be taken, which was very

unlikely ever to happen, "the river being more than two furlongs broad, and deeper than two men standing one upon another; so that the city was thought to be stronger and better fortified by the river than by the walls." And, lastly, as our time will not admit of entering more minutely into details, it was foretold that the city should be taken by surprise during the time of a feast. The Prophet Jeremiah saith, "I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon; and thou wast not aware, thou art found and also caught." Again, "In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the Lord." And again, "I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her captains and her rulers, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of Hosts." And, accordingly, the city was taken in the night of a great annual festival, while the inhabitants were dancing, drinking, and revelling. These predictions, considering the time of their utterance, must be allowed to present a powerful and convincing argument of the truth and inspira-

tion of the Holy Scriptures. In the language of a learned expounder of the prophecies, after he had traced still more fully the correspondence of events in more recent times, “well might God allege this as a memorable instance of his prescience, and challenge all their false gods and votaries to produce the like.” “Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no God else beside me, a just God and Saviour; there is none beside me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” At the same time, he adds, “it must afford all readers of an exalted taste and of generous sentiments, and all the friends and lovers of liberty, a very sensible pleasure, to hear the Prophets exulting over such tyrants and oppressors as the kings of Assyria. Not only in this particular, but in the general, the Scriptures, though often perverted to the purposes of tyranny, are yet in their own nature calculated to promote the civil as well as the religious liberties of mankind; and besides this, let it be remembered, for the

comfort and encouragement of the Church of God, that Nineveh and Babylon, whose fall these Prophets were so abundantly inspired to predict, were both of them enemies to the people of God: the one subverted the kingdom of Israel, and the other the kingdom of Judah; the one carried away the ten tribes; and the other, the two remaining tribes into captivity.”

Having pointed out the fulfilment of Prophecy in this case, let us now observe upon the *sins* which are specially laid to the charge of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon. Pride was, of course, one of the number. I say, of course, because throughout Scripture, almost universally, wherever the downfall of any nation, family, or individual, is recorded at any length, pride is alleged to have been, in part, the cause. In this instance, Daniel said to the King, “Thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven.” The king was proud in heart, and set himself against the Lord of heaven; considered himself, perhaps, the sole maker and builder of his fortunes; reckoned himself (as many foolishly do) an independent being; having no becoming, that is, constant

sense of the goodness and Providence of the Author of all good and the Supreme Disposer of events. No wonder that he was humbled! rather may we admire the forbearance of Almighty God, whose judgments do not always so closely pursue the rebel heart and spirit which will not acknowledge Him in all its ways.

Belshazzar's second crying sin was, 'sacrilege and profaneness.' He used the sacred vessels, which, in the first instance, had belonged to the Holy Temple, and, afterwards, had been dedicated to the service of his own gods; he used these for purposes of drunkenness and revelry; and, with libations poured forth in them, he praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor know. This was bold and daring affront to the Majesty of Heaven. He took the sacred vessels of His Temple, and with them celebrated the orgies of idols, His utter abomination. Sacrilege consists in robbing God of things set apart to his service, or in applying them to common and secular uses; and severe has been the wrath of God with which it has been visited. "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me, saith

the Lord," by the mouth of the Prophet Malachi. "But, ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? in tithes and offerings; ye are cursed with a curse." Eli's sons were sons of Belial, for they robbed God of His sacrifices, to furnish their own tables; hence the curse of desolation on the whole family; and Phineas and Hophni the sons, were slain in one day. By some it is thought that Adam's guilt was of this nature; he used, as common, a tree which God had made holy: if this constituted his guilt, the whole earth was cursed because of sacrilege. Under the Gospel the crime of Ananias and Sapphira was partly that of sacrilege; they defrauded the Church of a portion of the produce of some land; making profession that the whole of it was devoted to the service of Christ. And, to say no more, sacrilege was, probably, the particular sin, the one above others, which drew down on Belshazzar the prompt indignation of Almighty God.

The third accusation against the king was, that he was guilty of grievous sins of omission; "the God, in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." This implies, that the general tenor of the king's

life and proceedings was injurious to the cause of morals and religion; and such as militated against the honour of God. And this charge attaches to many whose consciences may acquit them of flagrant iniquity; they are guilty of not having glorified God. No gross sin can, perhaps, be alleged against them; but their habits of irreligion and uncharitableness, and the general tenor of their conversation and proceedings, are opposed to the good of society, and promote not the fear and love and worship of God. Every man, in every station, is possessed of some influence amongst his associates, in his family or neighbourhood; if he does not exert it on the side of virtue and religion, but fails to make a beneficial application of it; he is guilty of not glorifying God; and the sentence pronounced against him who buried his talent in the earth was, be it remembered, one of the heaviest condemnation.

The last sin with which the Prophet reproached the king was the neglect of warnings. Daniel recalled to his remembrance the fate of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar; who, because his heart was lifted up and his mind hardened, was deposed from the throne, driven from the

sons of men, deprived of his reason, and conformed in mind and desires to the state of the beasts that perish; “until he knew (said the Prophet) that the Most High God ruled in the kingdom of men, that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will,” and yet (adds the Prophet), “thou, his son, O Belshazzar! hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this.” The punishment of Nebuchadnezzar must have been lively in his recollection; yet Belshazzar walked in the same sins. As his fathers did, so did he; and so do others, with other men’s experience before them, whereby to profit; with the Word of God constantly sounding in their ears that sin shall not go unpunished; and with awful examples before them of sinners cut off in the midst of their iniquity.

These were Belshazzar’s sins. The sentence pronounced against him by reason of the same is the next particular marked out for observation. In the midst of his impious banqueting a hand appeared and wrote on the wall these four words —“Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.” Daniel himself shall be their interpreter. “Mene” signified, “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.” It denoted that the Babylonish

monarchy was at an end, and also the days of the king's life; the extinction of the kingdom, and the death of the king; and the word being doubled or repeated, imported that the event was most certain, and would most assuredly take place: so, at least, we are taught by the Patriarch Joseph; for he told Pharaoh that a dream being doubled unto him was, because the thing was established, and God would shortly bring it to pass. The next word, 'Tekel,' is expounded by Daniel—"thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting." In the idiom of Scripture, God is said 'to weigh the spirits'—'to weigh the path of the just'—'to weigh the actions;' and good men are likened to the precious metals without alloy; to gold and silver tried in the fire: and wicked men are called reprobate silver, because the 'Lord hath rejected them;' or, else, they are likened to the viler metals, or to dross the refuse of the more precious ones. Taking these figures of speech into consideration, "thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting," would signify, "God hath weighed thee against pure gold and silver, and found thee base metal, or dross; He hath compared thee with good men, and found thee a fit

object of Divine wrath. The first word of the handwriting determined the king's life and the fall of his kingdom: the second, we fear, his hopeless condition beyond the grave; that, as 'his day of repentance was gone,' there remained to him nothing but a certain fearful looking for of that judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries of God. And to this there was added the word "Upharsin," or, as it is in the 28th verse, "Peres." The two words are, in substance, the same; the one being the root of the other. "Peres" signifies "to divide," and 'Upharsin' 'and they divide.' Peres is also the proper name of Persia; and the Prophet, coupling these two senses of the word, drew from it the significance, "thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

Such was the awful sentence denounced against and executed on Belshazzar. Let us now reflect on the case with a view to our own improvement. In Belshazzar we have an instance of a man, a gross sinner, living in all honour, affluence, and luxury, presiding at a royal banquet in seeming ease and security. We can imagine him before us, 'Lord of the Feast,' bidding bold defiance to the Majesty of

Heaven; he moves, and the courtiers do him reverence; he speaks, and they shout "the voice of a god, and not the voice of a man." The cups are crowned; the blasphemous jest goes round; drunkenness and riot are the order of the day; his princes, his wives, his concubines, drink fearlessly from the holy vessels, after his example, and praise the gods of wood and stone. Who so great as king Belshazzar? who did not envy him? 'Prince of men,' and careless of the wrath of heaven! Ignorant, presumptuous, wicked mortal! at this very time he was but one short remove from death and judgment. He whom he had wantonly and daringly provoked, had listened to his profaneness, had marked his pride, his obduracy, his resolute persistence in sin; had weighed him in the balance and found him wanting as an object of longer forbearance: and the irrevocable decree of deprivation and utter destitution had already issued forth. That very night was to be the limit of his exultation; and then his throne should be pulled down, his kingdom given as an inheritance to his enemies; his body consigned to death, and his soul to regions of despair. It did not please God to send him affliction or sickness, which might,

perhaps, have brought him to his senses; nor reverse of fortune (previously to his catastrophe), which might have taught him the secret of his own and others' prosperity. He had had a powerful and singular warning in his own family; he had the same Prophet to consult; the lights of nature, reason, conscience, were vouchsafed for his guidance: these he despised, and he was suffered in health and wealth, and regal dignity, to follow his own heart's lust, and to perfect his own destruction.

We cannot explore the secret counsels of God: we know not what may be already written concerning one or more of us in the book of human destiny; a decree may already have been sent forth 'this night to require our souls;' we cannot sensibly discern it; there is no prophet to interpret: we may have no more cause, nor so much as Belshazzar had, to expect such event. All things may conspire to persuade us that we have long time to live: there may be no symptoms of decay; health and spirits may promise length of days; friends and fortune may hold forth the prospect of long enjoyment: but let not such fallible appearances betray us into an indifference concerning the things of eternity!

A noble vessel may be wrecked in a smooth sea, as well as in the midst of storms and tempests: a peaceful sky is oftentimes the harbinger of a convulsion which rends the earth. If worldly prosperity were any evidence of security, who so safe as king Belshazzar? if abundance of pleasures, friends and flatterers, were a trust, in which to confide; how was Belshazzar overthrown? A chance may give them, a Providence may with a silent breath strip us of them; and leave us, like Belshazzar, hungry, and thirsty, and naked.

Are we then guilty of Belshazzar's sins, or of sins as hateful in the sight of God as his? Are we as little prepared as he was, for an event which must happen at one time, and may happen at any time? Weighed in the balances, should we be pronounced wanting in that which God requires; in those conditions to which His mercy is promised? In our bodies of clay is there a proud heart which lifts itself against the Author of our Being, the Giver of all good, the Redeemer of our souls, and despises His Sabbaths, His ordinances, and will have none of His salvation? In mouths made for blessing, is there a sacrilegious tongue of blasphemy or profaneness? Are our lives so fashioned, our conversation so

ordered, our households so regulated, that praise redounds to the Christian faith? Do we carry ourselves in humility and wisdom, walking in the midst of mysterious Providences which may be charged with a special warning to us? Oh, that we could read the story of Belshazzar to those who most need it, and yet studiously fly beyond the reach of wholesome and religious admonition; or that we could drag men from the haunts of iniquity and dissipation, and compel them to listen to it! The libertine when he enters the chamber of vice should look to it carefully, cautiously; there may be a handwriting proclaiming that he shall never escape alive. If he do not perceive it, let him not be over-confident; still it may be written, in a character which he knows not. One hour, that very hour in which the gamester may be most cunningly employed in contriving disgrace and ruin to an unsuspecting friend; that same may be the last hour of his respite from the judgment of an all-searching God! that very hour in which the blasphemer may dare his utmost, may be the same in which the sacrilegious tongue shall be for ever silenced, and disabled from praise and blessing! Ah, but such persons are not present;

and, if they were, they would probably remain unmoved. They have continued in their respective courses for years; again and again, perhaps, have they in these ways transgressed, and no evil has befallen them, and they are incredulous of any; and will not learn wisdom by reason of the favour shewn to them. Oh! that they would reflect that, in the nature of things, certain judgments can come but once, and then they are men's overwhelming. Affliction may come and go and return again; a Providence may pass by and near, again and again, and only to make its voice be heard: but death is that which can come but once; and when once it takes its hold, it never leaves its victim except in heaven or hell. Belshazzar had, perhaps, often transgressed in like manner; but *that* night the judgment came. *What* night? A night of the event of which he had no knowledge, and which was only distinguished from other nights by the secret counsels of God.

This we would solemnly urge on the openly profane and wicked. But let us all endeavour to profit by Belshazzar's narrative. He was weighed in the balances and found wanting in those conditions to which the mercy of God is

covenanted; shall we be found faithful? More, infinitely more of the Divine will has been revealed to us than to him; our responsibility is immensely increased beyond his. We are stewards of the mysteries of God—His Word, His ordinances, His gracious scheme of Redemption. If they, to whom these blessings were denied, were yet inexcusable in that they glorified not God; how shall we escape, privileged as we are beyond all comparison with men of former days? Let us look to our *faith*. Is it agreeable to God's last and best Revelation? Do we believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent to be the propitiation for the sins of the world? do we put our whole trust in our Redeemer, casting away all vain and proud dependences! Let us look to our *works*: do these bear witness, in holiness and benevolence, that they are the fruits of a religion of purity and love? Whose shall those things be which we are now providing? When death comes, shall they pass at once and for ever into others' possession; or by a life of Christian principle, of constant progress in holiness and charity, are we laying up for ourselves treasures which thieves cannot steal, nor rust nor moth corrupt?

SERMON XXI.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE X. 33.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

A certain lawyer—one of those Scribes whose profession it was to study and teach the law of Moses—came to Jesus, tempting him, and saying, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” This question, it would seem, did not arise from any honest desire to learn of Christ, but rather, it would appear, to have been proposed with a view to ensnare our Lord into the delivery of some doctrine at variance with the laws of Moses, and which should give occasion to stigmatize Christ as a teacher of heresy. Our Lord, knowing the design with which it was put, instead of vouchsafing any direct answer,

referred the lawyer to the very authority which he had hoped that Christ would have set at naught. He said unto him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" The lawyer, answering, said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." The lawyer knew his duty, and what was needful to eternal life; for Jesus said to him, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." But the lawyer, as he knew his duty, so, apparently, he thought that he had performed it; for immediately, willing to justify himself—that is to make it evident that he was not wanting in his duty—he demanded, "And who is my neighbour?" His reasoning in his own mind, and when our Lord said to him, "this do," was probably of *this* sort:—"Where is the necessity, or wherein the propriety, of enjoining me, 'this do,' when I have always done it? I love God, and I love my neighbour; that is, all of my own nation and religion! what more is required of me in the laws of Moses, or according to the terms of eternal life which thou hast named? But, perhaps,

thou puttest a different construction on these laws, and understandest them in some *peculiar* way or sense. There can hardly be any variance of opinion between us concerning the first and great commandment: but, perhaps, thou accountest me deficient in the second, ‘the love of my neighbour.’ To begin, then, with first principles, and to settle terms before we discuss things, ‘Who, in thy opinion, is my neighbour?’” Had our Lord answered him at once, that the term ‘neighbour’ ought, by no means, to be restricted to those of one’s own nation or religion,—had our Lord told him that the duty of ‘loving our neighbour’ comprehended works of mercy and kindness, even to an *enemy*; and had He shewn, as might easily have been done, that this definition and extension of the duty were strictly conformable with the words, as well as the spirit, of Moses’s law, the lawyer had probably replied with doubts and quibbles, and learned Rabbins’ opinions; and at last had parted from Christ, if not elated with a fancied superiority in the conduct of the discussion, yet in doubt whether, after all, the duty in this enlarged sense was so clear as to claim implicit obedience on his part.

To prevent needless discussion—to cut off all pride of argument, and to strike at once conviction into the heart of an unwilling listener, our Lord proceeded by way of parable—the apposite and touching parable of the Good Samaritan; and afterwards asked the lawyer himself what was his opinion of the man that shewed mercy to the poor Jew who had fallen among thieves, and been left half dead. The Jews hated the Samaritans with a perfect hatred. “There be two manner of nations which my heart abhorreth,” saith the son of Sirach: “they that sit upon the mountain of Samaria, and they that dwell among the Philistines.” “Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil,” said the Jews, in their bitter malice against our Lord. The Jew, consequently, had no reason to expect the Samaritan’s benevolence; yet the Samaritan ministered to the poor Jew as if he had been his own brother. The lawyer could not help confessing that the hated Samaritan was ‘neighbour’ to the Jew who had fallen among thieves, and been left half dead; his prejudices of nation and religion succumbed before this act of mercy; the duty ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ instantly

branched out in his view beyond the narrow limits of country and kindred, and extended to all and every human being, even the most hated or hateful, who might stand in need of help. He had learned an important lesson in a summary and imperceptible manner; he could not be angry with his teacher, for this was no other than his own conscience. If his pride was wounded, his rhetoric spoiled, his plot defeated, he himself was the only one to be charged with it. So, without any offence at Christ, which might have hindered any benefits of conviction, whilst his error was forcibly presented to his mind, and his self-righteousness abased, he was dismissed by the Saviour, to go and imitate a conduct which he could not help admiring in others, but in which he had hitherto been woefully deficient.

The skilfulness of our Lord's proceeding on this occasion is manifest, and may be taken in illustration of the doctrine, that our "Lord spake as never man spake." In the first place, it was no ordinary prudence on this particular occasion to speak by parable. Any direct enunciation of the doctrine inculcated, any formal and open reasoning that the 'love of

our neighbour' embraced acts of mercy to our most acknowledged enemies, would have been met with a proud and obstinate resistance; and if conviction had been wrought, it had been of a sullen and unprofitable character, as is commonly the case with an antagonist vanquished in argument. But the proceeding by parable—whilst it engaged the attention, and offered no avowed opposition to the prejudices; and concealed from the lawyer the end aimed at, and flattered his pride in that he himself was constituted the arbiter of the matter in question; also took him by surprise: and, if he did not profit by the result, it was not because of the unwelcome way in which truth had been brought home to him; nor because any feelings had been excited in the course of the discussion likely to harden him against the conclusions of his own mind.

But it was not simply in proceeding by parable that our Lord exhibited his prudence. The structure of the parable was also most skilful and discreet. Had our Lord made a Jew to be the one who shewed mercy on the Samaritan; the lawyer's mind had probably been from the very first biassed against convic-

tion; he might, then, have argued that the Jew by shewing mercy had offended against the common feelings of his countrymen, or that he had erred through weakness and mistaken tenderness, or through ignorance of the estimation in which the Samaritans were held; and in defiance of the views maintained by certain learned Rabbis or doctors. All these subterfuges or ways of escape from reproof and condemnation were cut off by the Samaritan being made the benefactor, and a Jew the partaker of his mercy.

Whilst we say thus much on our Lord's wisdom in employing the parable and constructing it such as it is, its obvious drift was to teach the lawyer, and to teach us, that "the love of our neighbour" is imperfect, if it embrace not a due regard for all mankind, even our enemies. "Go and do thou likewise," said our Lord to the lawyer. This Samaritan shewed mercy to his enemy: *he* then understood aright the precept "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Go then, and if thou wilt be perfect in the duty, consider thine enemy thy neighbour, 'love thine enemy.'

It was easy for our Lord to enjoin this; but

is it easy for man to perform it? The precept 'love your enemies' was born in heaven, came down from heaven on our Saviour's lips; was published and perfected in our Saviour's dying for those who "hated him without a cause;" and it finds its earthly resting-place in the hearts of those only who have truly learned of Him, and are 'meek and lowly in heart' and heavenly minded. But is it an easy and common perfection even in the Christian world; eminently privileged as it is above the Jewish in the full knowledge of that Divine love which originated and accomplished our redemption, and in the imitation of which we all confess that the path to glory lies?

'Love your enemies,'—before we enquire whether this is a perfection common amongst Christians, let us first reflect what a different aspect the Christian world would present, if we had yet learned to love our friends and strangers, not to say enemies. What excuses are put forth and prevail, even to the neglect of the most ordinary and bounden duties of humanity! Make known the case of a fellow creature in distress or suffering; many, very many, we rejoice to know, would thank us for the opportunity of

shewing mercy and manifesting their zeal to impart as freely as they have received of God; but what numbers would hear or read it with indifference! how many would cloak their uncharitableness, under false and shameless pretences! With some it would be the plea that they have not the means of rendering assistance; and yet their next step, perhaps, would be to squander in extravagance, in folly or vice, that which would have amply ministered to the alleviation of suffering, to the building up again the health and happiness of a brother in need, perhaps of a family dependent on his single exertions. With others, the habitual excuse is that they have not *time*; but if their ox or their sheep had fallen into a pit—however urgent or continuous their engagements—would they not find time to rescue them? or would they not send others to their help? alas! how much better is a man than a sheep; but how often is he less heeded by his fellow men, because no private interest will be served by his preservation. Another pretence with many is, that their health and strength are by no means equal to the work of active benevolence: their health will not admit of it, or their spirit would sink under

the scenes of suffering with which they would come into contact. As to the latter pretence, we would answer that it is no extraordinary demand to make of human beings that they should strengthen themselves for an acquaintance with human woe and sorrows. Our condition in this life admonishes us, that it is most unwise to cultivate the sensibilities of our nature so that they unfit us for an encounter with those changes and chances which may come to any man's home. We should learn to bear a *little*, that others and ourselves too may suffer less. The most sensitive may be called upon to witness scenes for which the strongest are not more than equal; and if they have not beforehand learned a self-control and a self-denial, they may one day sacrifice most precious interests to that unacquaintance with mortal vicissitudes which they have carefully consulted. But as to the general plea—they who make the want of health and strength an excuse for their apathy under benevolent appeals, have *this* an obvious answer, and to their condemnation: What they cannot do through weakness, they may enable others to do, who have cheerfully taken upon themselves the office and responsi-

bility—they can render help to charitable institutions; they can place their bounty in hands which will faithfully administer it, and whose duty is to be the almoners of other men's means.

But, besides these pretences, there is another, and, in our times, a very common one; which not only thins the stream of benevolence, but sometimes dams up its very source; and this is, the dread of imposition. And it must be allowed that too much reason of this fear exists; and the frequent abuse of benevolence often leads to its disuse. But the *fear* of being imposed upon will not suffice to a truly Christian mind. Benevolence is not the only direction in which we are exposed to fraud; we are liable to be practised on in this way in our ordinary dealings with our neighbour; and does our vague suspicion, or fear of it, withhold us from these dealings? Does the single dread of it forbid us to traffick, or hold communication with those who may be guilty of it? or has it rather and only the effect of making us wary and enquiring? So, also, the true Christian will not abstain from works of love and mercy because of his liability to be imposed upon;

this will make him careful, but not callous; it will urge him to enquire, and search into the cases submitted to him. To *think* a man ‘an impostor,’ is an easy way indeed to evade charitable appeal; but it is also, and frequently *only* a wanton excuse for a heartless evasion of our duty. They who have time should examine and probe cases of want and wretchedness which are brought within their knowledge. This would be a course of proceeding very beneficial to themselves, as well as to the poor, and to society at large. They would find, that whilst many refrain from benevolent interference through the fear of their bounty being abused; there are also many who, through the fear of being suspected as impostors, will not solicit benevolence, but studiously shun the light and avoid observation, and prefer in secret the utmost endurances. They would learn, in miserable abodes, true accounts of the vicissitudes of human life, of melancholy reverses, of grievous inroads, which change of fortune can make in mind and character, as well as in the external condition; accounts more tragic, faithful, instructive, and touching, than the numberless fictions on which multitudes waste their

sympathy; the busy world, moreover, would know, through their means, where they might safely and best bestow their benevolence; and the unfortunate poor would be distinguished from the profligate, and the industrious from the idle.

The turn which this discourse has taken, may seem to be a wide wandering from the subject directly before us: but it was hardly possible to contemplate the heavenly doctrine of the parable, that we should 'love our enemies,' without calling to mind the very partial and imperfect manner in which the easier and more natural duty of 'loving our friends,' those of our own nation and religion, is discharged: and if, in combating any of the excuses which are most commonly put forth in defence of such uncharitableness, I have availed any thing to the promotion of benevolence; the irregularity of the digression will be amply compensated by its practical utility. But the digression is not altogether foreign to the purport of the parable: for seeing what pretences hinder the exercise of love to our brethren, our fellow countrymen and Christians; we may be sure that these would oppose with more than tenfold readiness and

obstinacy the exercise of love towards our enemies. But, besides these pretences, what powerful passions must be brought into subjection before we carry out the heavenly doctrine of the parable! ‘Love your enemies’—why, place an enemy in our power, and what does revenge cry? ‘crush him, or use him for thy purpose, or at least make him feel thy dominion over him:’ reduce him to misfortune, and does not pride say? “disown him, disclaim all fellowship with him;” and spite and malice whisper? “exult before him, and shew him thy state and dignity.” Find him in sickness—and the wounded feelings dictate an apathy, and that we leave him to his portion, as the just retribution of God.

Thus do the corrupt and angry passions of our nature, reason and persuade; but the religion of Jesus Christ saith, “if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them; and if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.” “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good;” thou hast found out thine

enemy's fault; *thy* sins are not hidden: he hath done thee wrong; thou art perpetual transgressor against thy Supreme and constant benefactor; thou seest his misery, if mercy be not shewn him; oh, think of thine own, if judgment without mercy award thy eternal portion! And it is the glory of Christianity that, exhibiting the purest morals, she can set forth a motive to obedience, which shall affect the heart, in the absence of all temporal considerations of profit or expediency.

It has been imagined that, under this beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan, there is a representation of Adam's fall, and of man's recovery through the interposition and love of our Redeemer. We do not yield to this opinion to the extent of holding that the parable was designed to *teach* us these doctrines; for none, ignorant of the fall and redemption of man, could possibly have discovered them from this parable without assistance from other Scriptures. But—whilst we forbear to assert that the parable was designed for this end—it is impossible for a Christian to read it, without observing how aptly, in its leading particulars, it accords with our condition by nature, and recovery by that grace which has

brought salvation. A miserable mortal fallen among thieves, stripped of his raiment, wounded, left half dead, neglected by his fellow men, and in particular by those, the Priest and Levite, whose sacred profession it was to minister to human necessities—is this either a too fanciful, or a too highly-coloured description of that which had been *our* condition, but for the merciful interposition of Him whom men in their hatred reproached as being a “Samaritan and having a devil,” but to whom we look up as the Great Physician of souls. ‘Dead in trespasses and sins’ was the dismal handwriting against us. There was no garment of righteousness wherewith to cover us. The Priests of Baal or of the Gentile world would have left us ‘wounded’ with knives and lancets, as if by such penances we could propitiate the Divine favour. The Priest and Levite had given us over to be elsewhere healed of our infirmities: for no man can by any means redeem his brother, and give to God a ransom for him. The Saviour journeyed in the path where we lay; the path of danger and misery to the soul: he found us helpless and deserted; he saw that there was no man, and ‘wondered,’ or took especial notice, that

there was no intercessor. He knew that we were haters of God and of Him; and that for His good deeds he would suffer an ignominious death. He might have passed by; for, although sent by the Father, it was of His own free-will He came: He might have passed by, for we had no claims on His mercy: but He passed not by; He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows: He was *esteemed* a sinner, stricken, smitten of God indeed, afflicted, for His own iniquity: but He was wounded for *our* transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends: but hereby perceive we His love, because while we were yet sinners He died for us. “Beloved,” saith St. John, “if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” And this is the great principle and example which the Gospel holds forth, wherefore we should ‘forgive our enemies,’ and eradicate from our breasts every feeling of malice and bitterness: and it finds the way to the heart of every disciple ‘indeed.’ We must all appear before that judgment-seat, where Infinite Love shall preside, to try and prove the

souls, which, at the most precious cost, were ransomed from endless misery. How shall that frail mortal who hath denied mercy to one of like passions with himself, abide His gaze who died to save an ungrateful world! How shall he hope for acceptance who takes one enmity with him to that tribunal which is love unspeakable, founded in the Eternal counsels, and, like the rainbow, compasseth the vast range of heaven and earth! Oh! let the love of God in Christ enlarge our views, expand our hearts, that we look upon all mankind as brethren, and do them good without exception, as we have opportunity. Let not the wrongs and evils of this passing scene debase and pollute those souls which have been purchased at the precious cost of the Saviour's blood. "Forgive and ye shall be forgiven," was said by Him who hath the gift of eternal life. 'Forgive *as* we forgive' is our daily prayer: that it may not be turned to sin, let us put away all bitterness and wrath, and anger, with all malice; and be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Whether foe or friend require our good offices, if we can render them with safety to the interests

of virtue and society, let us cheerfully do it. Let no ingratitude on the part of man minish the measure, or hinder the demonstrations of that gratitude which is due to Him who is the source of all our blessings, and of our means, and in whose service we look for eternal life. And if, whatsoever we do, we do in the name, the faith and love of Christ; when He shall again appear, not as the despised and rejected of men, but the Lord of power and might, He will repay us all that we have endured and remitted, as well as done, in obedience to His will and command; “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.”

SERMON XXII.

NOAH; A SINGULAR CHARACTER.

GENESIS vi. 9.


These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

THESE words would be regarded in the present day as a poor substitute for the ordinary boastings and embellishments of a genealogical table. Men had rather trace their ancestry to the great than to the good, to the successful than to the just; and often will they pass by the good and the just, simply that they may glory in a more remote antiquity. It would seem, however, to have been the judgment of Moses—and his in this particular, is but a transcript of the Divine—that it was greater honour to Shem, Ham, and Japhet, the fathers of the postdiluvian world, that they descended from one “who was just and perfect in his generations, and

walked with God," than it was that they could claim direct affinity with the truly earth-born and indigenous. He might, of course, have traced them up to Adam, but he advances not higher than to the "preacher" and practiser of righteousness.

Noting this by the way, we proceed to observe respecting Noah, that in him we have an instance of one man, together with his family, singled out by Almighty God in the day of his heavy displeasure, as an object of especial mercy and favour. We may be confident that this was no capricious or reasonless selection on His part, who regardeth not the persons of men; we may be sure that his exception from the general destruction was founded on some distinctions of a highly moral and religious character. And that of which we might have been assured, had there been no revelation to certify us of it, is plainly delivered in our text. "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." The obvious import of this is, that he preserved his integrity amidst the dreadful iniquity of the age, and was a holy man when infidelity, idolatry, intemperance and violence abounded.—This is a summary expo-

sition of the text ; but if we desire to appreciate his character more justly, we must look to the significance of the terms which are employed, and also take into account the circumstances in which he was placed.



Noah was a 'just' man, that is, a righteous man; or, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews expounds it, "heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Hence we are assured that he was a believer in the only true God, whilst the rest of mankind were given up to the worship of the lights in the firmament of heaven; and together with this belief, we cannot but be persuaded, considering the Apostle's high praise of him, that he looked forward to, and trusted in, the realization of the promise, "that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." It is observable, too, that although others are supposed to have erected altars, yet the earliest express mention of an altar for sacrifice occurs in the history of this patriarch, who, on his deliverance from the flood, "builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings;" from which it is fair to infer that he was not ignorant of

the sublime mystery of the Atonement, which these sacrifices were appointed to prefigure. And, such being his faith, we perceive at once with what fitness he was chosen as the father of the new world. Had he been an idolater or unbeliever, and preserved alone, the world had been left without any depository of the true religion; but his character being such as has been described, in him the great principles of our faith were handed down to the succeeding generations.

As he was "heir of the righteousness which is by faith," we are also instructed in our text that his faith was not a barren or speculative one; "He was perfect in his generations," and "he walked with God." The former of these two descriptions does not mean that he was sinless, for one transgression on his part is recorded, that 'no flesh should glory,' and as a warning to the best of men, that they should ever be on their guard; and affording us also an opportunity of exercising that charity which "rejoiceth not in iniquity," but would gladly cast a veil over the frailties of the righteous. It signifies, however, that upon the whole he was sincere and holy in his life and conversation.

This must be meant by the account given; and it is fully borne out by what is elsewhere stated respecting him. It is expressly said, “that according to all that God commanded him, so did he.” The Apostle Peter designates him “a preacher of righteousness;” in the Prophet Ezekiel he is classed with Daniel and Job, as one of those who, by their righteousness, should save their souls; and the practical, honest, and determined character of his faith is declared in that, “being warned of God, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house;” he hesitated not about the certainty of the event, or the difficulty of the undertaking; he regarded not the scoffs and ridicule of the surrounding unbelievers; but, in obedience to the Word of God, he prepared for a flood when it was contrary to all experience, and he knew not whence the deluging waters would come; and he entered the ark, committing himself in confidence to that method of deliverance which God had pointed out. And to this it is added, “he walked with God;” meaning, perhaps, that he specially devoted himself to the zealous discharge of his *ministerial* office; for so the phrase is applied to Enoch, Eli, and David, as prophet, priest, and

king respectively: but meaning, unquestionably—for other scriptures will not permit us to doubt it—that a course of virtue and piety was habitual to him; and that universally, in his works, words, and thoughts, he had a constant reference to the Divine will and presence.

These are the particulars respecting Noah's character which are stated in our text. In order, however, to form a just estimate of his virtues and worth, it is necessary that we take into account the times in which the patriarch flourished. These are described as being of extraordinary iniquity: and if other evidence than such statements is demanded, there is testimony abundant and overwhelming in the single fact of the deluge. For verbal evidence and declarations on this subject, let us restrict ourselves to the single chapter to which our text belongs. We are here told, that “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually;” again, “that the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence;” and again, that “it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it

grieved him at his heart.” These expressions, attributing repentance and grief to God, are, of course, to be received figuratively, and not as implying that the Supreme Being is subject to such emotions; but only that He fashioned His proceedings, so that to us it appears as if He repented and grieved. The sacred account, however, is more precise than this: it notes not only the general depravity, but also the particular sorts of wickedness which prevailed, and the principal of these are the three following: first, unlawful intermarriages; secondly, idolatry; and thirdly, violence and oppression. ‘The Sons of God,’ by which we are most probably to understand the believing race of Seth, intermarried with the infidel daughters of Cain, and the fruit of this union was ‘giants;’ meaning perhaps, that they were men of extraordinary stature, but certainly that they were monsters of iniquity; for, ‘the earth became corrupt,” and filled with violence. The other great and crying sin was ‘idolatry;’ and, according to certain learned expositors, the first intimation of this is conveyed in the words, when it is said immediately after the birth of Enoch, “then began men to call upon the name of the Lord;” by which they

say is to be understood that at that period men began *profanely* to call on the name of the Lord, worshipping the heavenly bodies, calling them by the Holy name, building them temples, and thinking by honouring them to obtain the favour of the Créator. But, be this interpretation correct or not, it is clear that idolatry prevailed amongst our antediluvian ancestors, for in the twelfth verse it is said: "God looked upon the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth;" His 'way' means His faith or religion; and 'corrupt' is an epithet applied in an especial manner in the Old Testament to the crime of idolatry.

If our information on these points had been more scanty than it is; if the sacred historian had mentioned nothing of these intermarriages, by which the degenerate race of righteous Seth sought to root out the true religion from the earth; if there had not been a syllable written respecting the prevalence of idolatry and violence; yet, in the single fact of the Deluge, we had been supplied with overwhelming proof that the iniquity of Noah's time must have been 'full and running over.' We know from history, and our own experience, how slow the

Supreme Being is in launching forth His temporal judgments; what a length of time He bears with empires, cities, and individuals: “truly He is a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.” It is not for a little or partial wickedness that He gives up cities to the enemy, spoils their polity, or buries them in oblivion. He would have spared Sodom, had there been found ten righteous in it. It was not in haste that He gave up His elect people to the four winds under heaven; they had murdered His servants, and, last of all, put to an ignominious death His Son, and would have none of His salvation. And what wickedness abounds amongst us; what sins, what vices, what infidelity and hypocrisy; and yet He withholdeth His hand, and suffereth us still to maintain our pre-eminence as a nation, and our privileges as His church. From these facts, we may be assured that it was no common wickedness which could have provoked the merciful and long-suffering God to destroy the beautiful creation which He had called into existence and pronounced ‘to be very good.’ And, if any circumstance can heighten our conviction of the same, it is perhaps this; that the rest

of the animal creation were involved in the common destruction, as if they had become polluted and hateful to the Creator, from having breathed the same air and come into contact with man.

Having said thus much of the depravity of Noah's age, I shall not consume time by enquiring into the reality of the judgment with which it was visited. The fact of the Deluge is admitted as true, by every nation to whose literature we have access; it is proved by the present external appearances of our globe,—by the discovery of fossilized remains of animals belonging to a former world,—by finding shells at the highest summits of the highest mountains—by the discovery of trees with their roots and tops at the bottom of mines, where it is impossible they could have grown; it is proved by ancient medals, by Egyptian and Grecian antiquities; and, finally, it is attested by the Bible, and when the learned or the unlearned can shake the integrity of the Sacred volume, then will it be time enough for us to have recourse to other authority. Indeed, the reason wherefore many have doubted the certainty of an event thus powerfully and by variety of evi-

dence supported, is because they have accustomed themselves to think too greatly and exclusively of this little world of our habitation. They forget that our earth is not the universe; and that its destruction is neither less possible nor probable; neither would it be a more considerable event, when compared with the universe, than a blotting out of a city or empire from the map of our globe.

Materials are now before us, from which we may form some notion of Noah's eminent praise. He was one man firm in the faith, when the whole world was sunk in idolatry; he walked with God, when all around were given to the worship of the lights of heaven; he was perfect in his generations, when the wickedness of mankind was such that it grieved the Creator that He had made man. The scoff and the sneer did not shame him; threats did not move him; impiety did not infect him. We know how difficult it is—how painful it oftentimes is, for one person in a family to keep to the ways of religion when the other of its members are living 'without God in the world;' how he is taunted, suspected, mocked; what hindrances are placed in his way, what temptations are set up whereby

to seduce him. And if in a circle of worldly and ungodly acquaintances any one presumes—for it is treated as presumption—to obey God rather than man, he is denounced as one of strange and peculiar notions, and the smile and the whisper are directed against him, if not open injustice perpetrated; and many have, by these means, been induced against their consciences to change their righteous course, and follow a multitude and do evil. Noah was proof against all such acts; and stood one and alone in opposition to the whole world. His virtue was great; and *singularity* was his virtue, and eminent praise. And if I repeat this again and again, it is because I would provoke to an emulation of his example. He was singular—not after the manner of the hypocritical Pharisees of later times, not after the fashion of fanatics of the present—but he was singular as being the only one of the Old World who held fast to that which is good, and kept himself to the religion of his fathers in the midst of a thoroughly depraved generation; and he was singular in this also, that as he once committed a sin, so it does not appear that he committed the same sin more than once. And are we not right in calling

his singularity a virtue, or rather the mother of many virtues? and is there not room or occasion for exhorting men that they be content to bear the stigma? The dread of singularity, even in a good cause, is one abounding reason wherefore much evil is done and much good left undone. One does not like to begin a good habit; it would be thought so strange: another fears to condemn evil; it would be flying in the face of so many: another hesitates to stand forward in the cause of virtue and benevolence; it would be so conspicuous: one will not have family worship, because his neighbour would denounce him as over-righteous: another is too timid to avow that he prays in secret: and thus are we sadly barren of good beginnings, and not half so strong as we might be, and otherwise should be, in the influence of righteous examples.

Oh! if we would be good Christians, we must not be frightened by the fear of singularity. The good Christian can hardly exist without being more or less singular. Many think otherwise, if we may judge by their works; many consider themselves such, although they offer no opposition by word or example to the pernicious opinions and ungodly habits of their neighbour.

If these, however, are in favour with God, Noah was not; if these are right, the Bible is wrong; if the religion which shall save us is of such an easy, accommodating, partial, temporizing character, Christianity is not the saving religion, and Christ our Saviour hath died in vain, and the precious blood of Martyrs was a wanton waste. It is not from the Gospel that such derive their course of conduct; it is not in the Gospel that they read their hopes of reward. The Gospel teaches us, that “strait is the gate and narrow the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it;” but if these are safe, or in the path of safety, “wide is the gate and broad is the way,” and the generality of men are walking in it. Oh! be we well assured, if we live the life of the Gospel, we must be more or less singular in the eyes of the world; singular in abstaining from pleasures inconsistent with our holy calling; singular as men of principle, amongst the many who depend on circumstances for the next character in which they shall appear; singular as men of sound piety and Christian integrity in the face of the fanatical and hypocritical; singular, *very* singular, as those who keep the Sabbath-day holy, to the shame of the

many who give to God but a small portion of the day which He hath consecrated to His service; singular, as of the comparatively few who obey their Saviour's almost dying command, and devoutly partake of His body and blood; singular as given to private and family prayers; and *very* singular, as given to works of charity according to the means which God hath vouchsafed us.

Ah! but we shall be answered again with the *dread* of singularity: "the world," "the world," this is all in all with many; and this would persecute them, and follow them with its ridicule or malice. Some respect may be due to the world: but is there no respect due to ourselves? if the noblest faculties within us, reason and conscience, demand a certain line of conduct, are we, through respect to the world to dishonour these high and characteristic endowments of our nature, which distinguish us from the sensual creation? is there, too, no respect due to the church to which we belong and in whose privileges we rejoice? but, through fear of the world, are we to suffer its character to be slandered, in consequence of our inconsistent conduct? is there no respect due to the pure religion which we

profess? but may we without sin exhibit it to the eyes of mankind, as if it were little different from, and in some points inferior to, even heathenish systems of morals and life? is not the first and highest reverence due to our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? and does it accord with this reverence that we make the world our master, and religion our convenience?—Let us seriously reflect what ‘good’ our singularity in a holy cause may produce; what benefits and privileges it may bring on ourselves; what happy effects it may work on others! Noah, by reason of it, became a type of Christ, and was a Saviour of the world, and a blessing to all succeeding generations; delivering down to them, not only his example, but the only true religion; with him, God first established a covenant of Providence, that the course of nature shall go on; a covenant of grace, that He would be to him a God. Now he was a good man, but no better than the grace of God made him, and can make us, if we diligently cultivate it. Let us seek this grace from on high, by the means of grace, and cherish it by a life of singular faith and holiness; and, although like him by so doing we shall certainly condemn the world,

like him, we may be a blessing to others, as well as ourselves blessed; a blessing to our families, friends, or neighbours, who, 'seeing our good works,' may be led to glorify God, and turn from the evil of their ways, and save their souls alive.

Thus we preach—and men listen to us,—but how few will heed us: they will go their way and mingle with the crowd, and console themselves with the thought, that, notwithstanding all that the minister hath said, there are many who are doing as they do, and they are "as good as their neighbours." So might, and probably did, many reason in the days of Noah. All, with one exception, were bad; and the rest were as good as one another. But were any saved, because their neighbours were as bad as themselves? No: they all perished, because they all were wicked. Personal, not comparative, excellence is that after which we should aim. We shall be recompensed after our own worthiness, not according to others' wickedness. Noah doubtless preached this righteousness; but men believed not him: we preach it, and men still sail with the tide of their neighbours' morals

and habits. Alas ! the stream of life runs on also, and it shall convey many 'whither they would not go,' if the God of this world had not blinded their eyes to the things which 'make for peace.'

SERMON XXIII.

THE SUN STOOD STILL.

JOSHUA x. part of verse 13.

*And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed,
until the people had avenged themselves upon
their enemies.*

UPON the death of Moses, Joshua succeeded as governor over the children of Israel. To stimulate and embolden him in the prosecution of the conquest of Canaan, God gave him this encouraging assurance upon his entrance into office: “As I was with Moses so will I be with thee, I will not fail thee or forsake thee; there shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life.” And this assurance was followed by a succession of miracles, all tending to the furtherance of that great work which Joshua was appointed to execute. The river Jordan—which then separated the Israelites from the Canaanites—was passed by a miracle; Jericho

and Ai fell by miracles; and the chapter before us contains an account of another miracle which has attracted greater notice than the others, and which I have selected for present remark.

The victories which Joshua had achieved over the places last named, naturally alarmed the neighbouring states. And the Gibeonites, dwelling close by, in order to secure themselves against the like disasters, sought an alliance with the Israelites; and by a novel device succeeded in forming one. Affecting to be strangers from a far distant country, they came disguised as weary and destitute travellers, clad in old garments, which they said had grown old by reason of their very long journey; and furnished with provisions, dry and mouldy, but which they said were fresh on the day of their departure from their home. The Hebrew princes listened to them; and the more readily, because they pretended a reverence for the name of the Lord God of Israel. They had heard, they said, all that He had done in Egypt, and all that He had done to the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side Jordan; but of the calamities which had befallen Jericho and Ai on their own side Jordan, and bordering on

their own cities, they affected to know nothing. They desired it to be understood, that the tidings of these recent events had not reached them, by reason of their remote habitation; but, having heard of their wonderful doings, they had determined to solicit alliance with a people whose arms were so successful, and to enlist under His banner whose countenance was the secret of Israel's prosperity.

Their scheme succeeded; for the princes of the congregation, "not asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord, made a league to let them live, and sware unto them." No sooner, however, was the treaty concluded, than five of the most powerful kings of Canaan resolved to punish these Gibeonites for their defection from the common cause; and they and all their hosts encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it. Joshua was called upon to fulfil the oath which he had imprudently taken. Gibeon was besieged, and he was bound by oath to rescue it. Five kings made war upon it; but if there had been fifty, the servant of the Lord must do the thing which he had sworn. And, moreover, he must be victor, for the Lord had said unto him, "there shall not a man of them stand before

thee." Yet what chance of success had Joshua; one general against five, one army against five? Accordingly, we are told that "the Lord fought for Israel:" and every stage of the battle witnessed Divine interference. "The Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them; and they which died with hailstones were more than they whom the children of Israel slew;" and, in further token that it was the work of the omnipotent God, "the sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

Such is the miracle which I have selected, principally for practical uses. But, before we proceed to this application of it, it may be useful to say a few words to meet the exceptions which unbelief has urged against it, and in support of our conviction of its reality. The unbeliever calls in question the possibility or probability of this miracle; or he fastens on a circumstance connected with it, which he pretends casts discredit on the whole history. It may, therefore, be worth while to exhibit the weakness of his cause.

As to the possibility of the thing—evidently all things must be possible to the Almighty,

except those which involve a contradiction of Himself and His essence; clearly it must be possible for one to stop the motion of a machine which could not move without his permission. In the language of a learned prelate, “the machine of the universe is in the hand of God: He can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole, with less trouble than either of us can stop a watch. How absurd then are the reasonings of those men who believe in the existence of an omnipotent God, and yet deny the possibility of the exertion of his power in other ways than those which are known to their limited experience.” If the possibility is thus certainly established; so is the probability: for what have we in its favour, and what against it? Against it we have the conceits, or unsupported denial of infidelity; or the experience of men, whose lot has been cast in very different ages of the world. And in its favour—to say nothing of some faint allusions to it in heathen writings—we have the unshaken credit of Holy Writ, together with the great improbability that Joshua could have succeeded in his conquests, as he did, without Divine interposition in his behalf; and if God did so interpose, it is of all things most probable

that by some wonderful sign He caused His interposition to be known.

But the objection which is most prominently put forward, lies against the terms of the miracle. It is said that "the sun stood still;" and this mode of expression is thought by some to be fatal to the credit, both of the miracle and of the historian; fatal to the miracle because, according to our understanding, the prolongation of the day could have been effected only by the earth's standing still; and fatal to the credit of the writer, because it is alleged that if he has erred in one point, he may have been altogether mistaken: and it is further presumed that if he were, as we believe him to have been, an inspired author, such inspiration would have preserved him from error of every description in his narrative. In answer to this objection, we may readily grant that it is characteristic of inspiration that they who were guided by it, have been kept free from error, with respect to natural facts as well as in doctrinal matters; and we may infer from this, that no fatal error as to physical facts shall ever be found in their inspired productions; but, admitting thus much, the utmost which can be alleged against Joshua is, that—

not speaking formally, and as a philosopher—he described an event in the only terms which at that time would have been understood by the people for whom he wrote; and employed a mode of expression, incorrect indeed, but which was in habitual usage at that time, and is to the present day; for we still talk of the sun's rising and the sun's setting, phrases just as unscientific as Joshua's: and, had he spoken with perfect accuracy, it would have been necessary, not only that he himself should have anticipated the results of science; but the people also, to have understood him, must have been suddenly enlightened with such a knowledge of the planetary system as we ourselves could not have boasted of, a few generations since. With whatever importance the unbeliever may desire to invest this circumstance, it is eminently satisfactory to the Christian to know, that whereas the Bible has been studied by the learned of all professions and pursuits, the philosopher, the classic, the astronomer, the geologist, and botanist; and by persons of almost every creed, and by those of none; and for the worst as well as best of purposes; yet the most evident and demonstrable objection which philosophy has

been able to urge against a book, which is not professedly scientific is, that Joshua has declared that the 'sun stood still,' and caused a prolongation of the day: whereas our maturer science assures us that this could have been effected only by the cessation of the motion of the earth. With this exception there is nothing in the Scriptures which is not consistent with the most accredited philosophical opinions. In some cases, the Scriptures have anticipated; and in all, except this, do they agree with the most approved modern discoveries; and in questionable matters — although as science advances present theories may be confuted—yet have we no cause of fear that the authority or statements of Scripture shall ever be disturbed.

Having said thus much of the circumstances, and in vindication of this miracle, from, in some respects, the puerile cavils of unbelief; I now proceed to the more profitable task of pointing out its various designs. And, in speaking of these, we must still adhere to the unscientific language of the Sacred record: for although it may have been that the earth, and not the sun stood still; yet, undoubtedly, both the Israelites, and the heathen, for whose use in part this

miracle was wrought, regarded it as it is popularly described.

The immediate, but not, perhaps, the chief object or purpose of the miracle may be gathered from these words in our text: "the sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies;" in nearly the words of the son of Sirach, one day was as long as two, until Joshua had destroyed them that resisted; that is, the five kings whom he took in the cave at Makkedah and put to death. It is expressly stated that the destruction of these kings was in obedience to a divine command; and a religious mind will not desire any further vindication of the proceeding. Yet ought it always to be remembered that the punishment of these and other Canaanitish people is represented in Scripture to have been the just fruit or consequence of their sins, and not any arbitrary work of God's wrath. And, as respects these five nations in particular, the measure of their iniquity was perhaps running over; and as they were the most powerful people, possibly also they were the most wicked: and so it pleased the Supreme governor of the world to make a signal and awful example of them. "The sun

stood still," that all the surrounding nations might witness the terrible vengeance executed by the true God upon those who had most conspicuously violated his laws. "Thine arrows walked in the light," says the Prophet Habakkuk, "thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger." The judgment was to be notorious as their iniquity; and Joshua was not to be regarded as the only offended power; so the great luminary of heaven stayed its Creator's bidding, and pointed out these miserable people as warnings to a guilty world, lest against others also the Lord should rise up "wroth as he was in the valley of Gibeon."

Beyond this end the Scriptures do not furnish us with any account of the uses which this miracle was intended to serve. We can readily believe however, that it contemplated other and also mightier benefits. God had promised Joshua that He "would magnify him in the sight of all Israel;" that they might know that as He was with Moses, so He would be with him; and we may hence conclude that another design of this miracle was to magnify one whom the Lord delighted to honour; and who was constituted

an eminent type of Him whose arm should bring salvation, and triumph over all the spiritual enemies of God, and spoil principalities and powers, and make a show of them openly; and lead the people of God into the heavenly Canaan. And, again, by this miracle, proclamation was made to all the neighbouring nations: “What nation is there so great as Israel? who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for.” “Come behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He has made in the earth; He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire!” “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”

These ends, the honouring of Joshua and the manifestations of Israel's privileges and the excellence of Israel's God, were all answered by this miracle; and there is nothing forbidding us to suppose that they were meditated by it. But, besides these, there is another use, and to which we are directed by the very nature of the miracle. The Almighty might, doubtless, have

magnified his servant Joshua, and proclaimed His own sovereignty as effectually in other ways; and He might as signally have destroyed His enemies within the space of a common day. There could have been no necessity with God for the “sun to have stood still and the moon to be stayed.” The destruction of these Canaanites might have been as fully accomplished without any suspension of the laws of the universe; by an earthquake, a destroying angel, or a raging pestilence. Now, as God never acts without reason, and as He hath given us reason whereby, in all humility, to trace out the ways of His government and Providence, and derive unto ourselves rules of conduct and instruction in righteousness; let us, in this instance, exercise the gift which He hath bestowed upon us; and, in all modesty, endeavour to find out a likely answer to this question—“wherefore did God proceed by the way of this particular miracle?” If we fail of full confidence in our answer, we certainly shall not fail to gather from the probable answer, much which we may turn to religious and practical account.

The sun and moon, we know, were objects of religious worship to the people of Canaan; and

not to them alone, but to all the world, with the exception of the Israelites. How admirably, then, adapted was this miracle to preserve the one in their steadfastness, and to warn the other of their sin. The Israelites saw, or believed that they saw, the gods of the surrounding nations arrested in their course, and held in subjection by Him to whom Joshua prayed, and under whose banners they were enrolled. And if the heathen had reasoned on this mighty prodigy, how could they have escaped from the conviction that their reputed deities were but servants of some mightier power? Suppose we then—and whilst there is somewhat to favour the supposition, there is nothing forbidding it—that this stupendous miracle was one and a vigorous attempt on the part of a jealous God to vindicate His own supremacy, and root out idolatry from the earth. The end contemplated must surely be confessed to be worthy of Him who will have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, and His glory to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; and if it failed of its just and beneficial effects, alas! the same complaint may be urged to a sad extent in respect of the gracious scheme of our redemption. And

as the end must be confessed to be worthy of God—so when we reflect upon the almost universal prevalence of idolatry, it can by no means be thought a thing incredible, or improbable, that the Creator should at some one time, in the annals of mankind, have thus interposed to rid His creation of this most crying sin against His majesty and unity. If He confounded men's language when they set themselves in perverse opposition to His pleasure, it cannot be improbable, that by some signal wonder, He would confound a dominant religion which was His especial abhorrence. If, under the Gospel, He sent His Son into the world 'to lighten the Gentiles,' it is not improbable, that under the Old Dispensation He wrought by some such universal miracle for His own name's-sake, and to rescue the heathen from that curse by which they were bound.

If we are at liberty to make this application of the miracle, we may add the case "of the sun standing still" to those many revelations and judgments by which the only true God has sought to root out idolatry from the earth. Yet, alas! idolatry has nevertheless always been one of the most crying sins of mankind. It was an

iniquity prevailing before the Flood; it is still the sin of many heathen people; it is the abounding sin of the Christian world—not indeed, in its grossest form, but in a sense and degree eminently hateful and injurious. According to an Apostle's teaching, "covetousness is idolatry;" and he probably meant by this "any inordinate desire of sensual gratification." The lovers of this world's pleasures, then, the lovers of this world's praise, and honours, and goods; all, in short, who are lovers and followers of earthly things more than lovers and followers of God; all who say in their hearts, if not with their lips, to any earthly pursuit, blessing, or enjoyment, "thou art my God;" and say it by seeking it first, and rejoicing in it most, and above the thought of God: all these are chargeable with the practice of idolatry. And if these are guilty, how few are innocent! and how often does God interpose, if not by miracle, yet by the fashioning of His Providence after the manner of this miracle, to convince us of our folly, and direct us aright to Himself, as the only fount and stability of our blessings, the only worthy dependence of the creature, the only fit object in which to centre our affections. Wherefore is it

that houses and cities, thrones and empires, are leveled to the dust? is it not, oftentimes, because of idolatry? men are worshippers of gold and silver, of power and dominion. Wherefore is it that beauty is changed to deformity? is it not, oftentimes, because men are worshippers of themselves. Wherefore is it that the strong are made weak; the mighty, impotent; and the confident, dependent? is it not oftentimes because men are worshippers of their talents, their rank or fortune? Nay, again: wherefore is it that one who is loved with the truest and tenderest affection, is hastily withdrawn from us? may we not say that it is often because of that idolatry whereby a creature is set on that throne in the human heart which of right belongs to God alone. We cannot think with the heathen, that God envies the felicity of his creatures, or that He grudges those delights and endowments which His own hand so freely bestows. No; God is love! But we pervert His gifts, and set them up against Himself; and make gods of His creatures and blessings; and then He arises 'wroth as he was in the valley of Gibeon;' and proves that He is Lord over the sun and moon of our idolatry. He asserts His claim to our undivided

homage. He exerts a power which belongs to Him alone; that we may not mistake against whom the offence is committed. Here He overthrows a kingdom; there He humbles the mighty; from one He takes away talents and health; from another a friend or child.

Oh! if we value the continuance of this world's blessings, as well as our everlasting welfare; if we would go down to the grave in peace, with our faculties entire, our fortunes unbroken, our children as olive plants around our table; amongst many things let us beware that we set up no rival in our affections against the Lord God Almighty. Let us always remember that there is one Being, benign, indeed, in His counsels, and merciful in His dispensations; but with boundless control over all that the heart of man can love, and the mind pursue; let us remember, too, that He is a jealous God, and will not suffer any compeer in our duty and affection. He gives us wealth that we may help the needy; power that we may do good and restrain the evil; talents that we may consecrate them in the service of religion and virtue; children that we may love them and train them in His nurture and admonition. These are His

gifts. Let us use them all to His glory; enlist them all in the promotion of His praise; hold them all in the humblest, and dutiful and constant, acknowledgment of His goodness, and pleasure, and power over all. This shall be a sure way to escape—not indeed that time and chance, which happeneth to all, ‘the good as well as the evil;’ but a sure way to escape from judgment by reason of idolatrous hearts and habits; and, whatever afflictions may fall to our share, they shall not appear in the awful dress of Divine retribution, but rather as the fatherly corrections of a loving parent who would wean us from the world but only to draw us nearer and more certainly to himself.

There is but another, and a short remark which I shall offer on this portion of Sacred history. It is plainly said in the narrative of this miracle, that “there was no day like that, before or after it.” Whilst this is an acknowledgment, on the part of the sacred writer, that the event was most singular and extraordinary in his eyes, who was familiar with miracles; it also instructs us that there are things which shall be but once in the annals of the world. And however simple this observation may seem, it

deserves thought; the worst of consequences resulting from a practical disregard of it. Many fool-hardy persons, for instance, rush again and again and wantonly into danger; and their excuse is that they have never yet suffered for their folly; and they forget that the penalty of their folly may be of such a kind that, in the nature of things, it can be exacted but *once* only; perhaps the sacrifice of life; and that, though they may escape again and again, their escape is so far from any evidence of exemption from punishment, that it is rather a certain warning of the same. In like manner, do men sin again and again against God; and because judgment tarries, and things proceed evenly, perhaps prosperously, they look upon this as a kind of indemnification, if not encouragement; it escapes them, that that punishment against sin which is certainly denounced in the Word of God can happen but once; and then it shall be the utter and irrevocable misery of the wicked. "It is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment:" if the judgment come not *before* death, it is only waiting its ordained course, and coming in its own order. Let us be warned by this consideration not to presume on impunity

by reason of any present exemption from the consequence of our folly. Once did the sun stand still; once was the world made, once was it drowned; once were we born; once were we placed in this state of probation for another and eternal world; once did the Saviour, the God incarnate, sojourn among men, and set before them an example of holiness and benevolence unparalleled; once hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And we have not yet done with those events of which the world shall have but a single knowledge. There was no day like that, when "the sun stood still and the moon was stayed;" another day is coming, great and terrible, emphatically 'the day of the Lord,' when "once again He shall shake the heavens and the earth," and the sea shall give up its dead; and death and hell deliver up the dead that are in them; and the dead, small and great, stand before God. There hath been no day like unto that; neither shall there be after. And still there is another event to be but once; for when "once the master of the house is risen and hath shut to the door," they who stand without and knock, saying "Lord, Lord, open to us," shall be answered with the awful

sentence “depart from me ye that work iniquity;” and these shall go away into everlasting misery, and the righteous into life eternal. Oh! let not the present evenness of things beguile us into the belief that it shall always be so. All history bears testimony that the world in its rise and progress has witnessed wonders: of these the most important have been those of a single occurrence; one yet remains, the greatest of all, and shall be granted to *our* experience. In the mean time, let us consider the goodness and patience of God, His long waiting; not as some men count slackness; but as His long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; and let us use “the favour shewed” as the most constraining of motives that we should learn righteousness.

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